DANCE AND IMMERSIVE PERFORMANCE: A MULTICASE STUDY OF

THREE INTERNATIONAL IMMERSIVE PRODUCTIONS

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DEDICATION

For dance and all its devotees.

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ABSTRACT

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INTERNATIONAL IMMERSIVE PRODUCTIONS

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This dissertation research focuses on the role of dance in immersive productions. The

study was prompted by investigation of the extant literature—including scholarly

research and critical reviews—which revealed a gap in the literature regarding the role of

dance in immersive productions. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact and

influence of dance in immersive performance through a multicase study of three

contemporary international immersive productions: *Sleep No More* by Punchdrunk

(United Kingdom), *Then She Fell* by Third Rail Projects (New York), and *Dance

Marathon* by bluemouth inc. (Toronto). The three productions were chosen as case

studies for the ways in which dance was prioritized as a primary mode of expression by

the artistic directors, including Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle of Punchdrunk; Zach

Morris, Tom Pearson, and Jennine Willett of Third Rail Projects; and Ciara Adams,

Stephen O'Connell, Sabrina Reeves, Lucy Simic, and Richard Windeyer of bluemouth

inc. The increased popularity of productions that engage audiences differently,

particularly through immersion, has prompted this research that explores how dance and

choreographic strategies are used as tools to enhance audience experience.

Primary data-gathering techniques included participant observation during performances of these productions; interviews with artistic directors, dancers, and audience members directly engaged with the immersive productions chosen as case studies; and examination of existing literature, including published scholarship, critical reviews, websites, social media sites, and fan blogs. In analyzing each of the three case studies, I draw on theater scholars, including Josephine Machon and Gareth White, as well as current research into trends of audience participation in the arts. Through an integrated process of philosophical questioning and qualitative research design, the study follows a theoretical line of inquiry focused on dance as a strategy of immersion in productions created by artistic directors, performed by dancers, and experienced by audiences. The inclusion of multiple voices allowed for discovery of diverse conceptual and perceptual frameworks for dance and immersive performance, which in turn shed light on the ways in which dance is contributing to the expanding parameters of new audience engagement models.

This research contributes to the field of international dance studies for the ways in which it centralizes dance in the discourse surrounding immersive performance and contributes perspectives of dance to immersive performance that have heretofore been largely missing. By contributing to the understanding of the role of dance as a strategy of immersion and its impact on the participation of audiences, issues and insights that emerge from this research may resonate with theorists and practitioners in contemporary performance and the fields of audience, media, cultural, and theater studies, furthering

analyses of dance in discussions that can yield continued insight for those dedicated to

the discipline of dance through both practice and scholarship.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During my doctoral coursework, my primary interest as a scholar was to investigate

the ways in which artists were creating new audience models for engagement with dance.

However, I was not aware of current productions that met the specific criteria I was

interested in, namely, productions that prioritized dance as the primary mode of

expression, which offered nonproscenium, multiperspective viewing angles; close

proximity to performers; and options for self-guided as well as interactive engagement.

While I might have initiated my own practice-research led project, I was not confident

that this option would provide me with the critical distance and perspective needed to

objectively analyze new models for audience engagement with dance. Hoping to engage

in conversations and dialogue with others to explore my questions and acquaint myself

with how others were conceptualizing new models, I joined Dance USA's online

program Engaging Dance Audiences (EDA). After I received a few e-mails, however, it

appeared that the EDA program was focused on building audiences in traditional

performance platforms rather than investigating new forms of participation.

Nonetheless, I continued to scan the e-mails from the EDA program as they arrived.

One in particular caught my eye: the announcement of the October 2011 publication of

Getting In on the Act: How Arts Groups Are Creating Opportunities for Active

Participation, a study commissioned by the James Irvine Foundation and conducted by

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WolfBrown.[1] From this study, I learned that conversations about the changing roles for audiences were not limited to the explorations of artists; indeed, the James Irvine Foundation dedicated significant funding in an investigation of the changing parameters for audience engagement in the twenty-first century. The report made clear that the perception of audiences as passive observers—the idea that audiences *watch* but do not *do*—was being reevaluated by individuals at all levels of art making and related research.

The James Irvine study contained profiles of performing groups that the authors cite as exemplars of practices intended to engage audiences to differing degrees. One group, Punchdrunk, from the United Kingdom, seemed familiar, but I had not seen their work and could not recall how or why I knew their name. The following notes from my research notebooks document the seeds of this project:

- ☐ I went to Facebook and searched my news feed and messages for any mention of Punchdrunk.
- ☐ I pulled up a message from an alum of the Dance Department at Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers, a former bachelor of fine arts student of mine, who was touring at that time with Pilobolus Dance Theatre. In our chat, she mentioned that Tony Bordonaro—another bachelor's alum from Mason Gross—had just become a company member with Punchdrunk's production *Sleep No More* in New York City.
- ☐ I then pulled up messages from Tony—indeed, he had sent me a message about his new gig and mentioned some online blogs to read so I could have background information about the *Sleep No More* production.
- ☐ I sent him a message: "I would love to come see you and talk with you more about this performance and your work with Punchdrunk. My congratulations to you!"

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[1] WolfBrown (www.wolfbrown.com) is a cross-disciplinary team of consultants who advise the cultural sector. They conduct research in participatory arts practices and in the arts and public policy.

☐ Tony messaged back: "I have a comp and would love for you to see what I'm doing. Feb 2nd is great—I'd love to see you and chat after…looking forward to it" (Bordonaro 2012).

I had an intrinsic interest in *Sleep No More* after learning that Tony was performing in the production; this interest expanded when I learned through the online resources he sent that *Sleep No More* was an immersive production. The term *immersive* implies live performance events in which audiences are afforded opportunities to actively participate in spatial and performance contexts designed to stimulate and heighten their senses.[2] As educational psychologist Robert E. Stake asserts, when there is "an intrinsic interest in the case, we may call our work intrinsic case study" (1995, 3). Thus, *Sleep No More* was established as my first case study. Described in previews, critical reviews, and fan blog posts as "immersive theater," *Sleep No More* was the first production in which I encountered immersive practices, by which I mean the strategies and techniques applied by artists who intend to create immersive experiences for audiences in live performance.

In fact, *Sleep No More* is part of a recent history over the past two decades in which dance, theater, and performance artists have experimented with creating productions that engage audiences in increasingly participatory ways. As stated in *Getting In on the Act*, there has been a "seismic shift" in participatory arts culture in Europe; this has taken place primarily in the United Kingdom, as well as in the United States and Australia

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[2] Theater scholar and practitioner Josephine Machon devotes significant sections in her two texts *(Syn)aesthetics* (2009) and *Immersive Theatres* (2013) to definitions of *immersiveness*, *immersion*, and *immersivity*. Similarly, *immersive* is the term used by artists such as Punchdrunk, Third Rail, and bluemouth inc., as well as by scholars and critics, to describe the genre of production, in attempts to distinguish the work from other performance events.

(Brown and Novak-Leonard 2011, 2). Part of this shift has been the introduction and subsequent success of immersive performance. From what I have sensed in participating as an audience member in immersive performance, it seems these productions offer audiences new experiences of dance by prioritizing their inherent knowledge of the body, knowledge that is both brought to and found in the embodied experiences and interactions encountered during the event. In this way, immersive performance may challenge the very nature of dance spectatorship by both engendering and complicating individual agency, engagement, and investment in dance.

I am situated in this research via three specific entry points and connections through which I have ventured into the realm of immersive performance: as an audience participant of recent immersive productions; as a choreographer who creates cross-disciplinary, site-specific, and participatory works; and as a scholar interested in the implications of new ways of conceptualizing dance and performance for dance spectatorship and for the dance field as a whole. Over the past twenty-five years as a choreographer, artistic director, and educator, I have explored alternatives for what choreographer and scholar Clare Dyson describes as the "traditional presentation paradigm for viewing Western contemporary dance" (2010, 5). Dyson defines the traditional presentation paradigm as one in which choreographic works are presented in proscenium arch and front-facing theaters through the creation of interdisciplinary and site-specific works (28). The term *immersive* had yet to enter the lexicon during the time in which I was working, in the past two decades, to challenge myself as a dance artist to consciously explore concepts of interactivity and participation in my choreography.

These concepts were part of my working vocabulary and derived from my desire to bring audiences into new performance environments (site-specific or alternative venues such as art galleries) and to partner dance with other mediums, including song, text, and video.

Over time I became more interested in sharing with audiences that which is often visible to only choreographers and dancers during the creation process in the studio—the opportunity to observe the dancing body in close proximity. For me, the proscenium theater establishes a distance between dancers and audiences that can render choreographic nuance invisible and obscure the visual and kinesthetic details of the dancing body. I am interested in audience members having access to the specificity and nuance of choreography. Thus, I sought productions of both dance and theater that offer nontraditional viewing possibilities, experimental options for engagement, and performances that that allow close observation of movement vocabulary. My curiosity about the design of new models for audience engagement led me to seek out work by other artists, leading me to the productions presented here as case studies.

My initial investigation of the extant literature—including scholarly research and critical reviews—revealed a lack of significant investigation into the role of dance in immersive performance. Prompted by the absence of scholarship dedicated to analyzing dance and immersive performance and my interest in exploring as many international perspectives as possible, I focused my research on the perspectives of artistic directors, dancers, and audience participants of three international productions, all of which have achieved critical and commercial acclaim: *Sleep No More*, by the UK-based Punchdrunk; *Then She Fell*, by Third Rail Projects, based in Brooklyn, New York; and *Dance*

Marathon, by bluemouth inc., a collective based in Toronto, Canada. Because these productions were actively being performed during the time of my study, I was able to study them as they were happening in order to consider the role of dance in their design and success, as well as their implications for dance spectatorship.

My dissertation focuses on immersive productions that prioritize contemporary dance practices as their primary mode of expression and that I have experienced as a participant observer. The three immersive productions presented as case studies here were created by artists with decades of experience in dance and theater practices. In addition, the work of these artists reflects years of research dedicated to the concerns of site specificity, architecture, and scenography, through which they have honed their techniques for immersing audiences in live performance events.

Prompted by the dearth of discourse about dance and immersive performance, I approached these productions with a curiosity to learn what, how, and why artists do what they do with dance and immersive performance and what their practices might be enabling and affording their audiences. I explore the ways in which immersive performance is contributing to different understandings about what dance and choreography can be in performance. My intention is to open up a dialogue about the ways in which the role of dance and choreography is changing in live performance. Artists making immersive performance are pushing beyond definitions and conceptualizations of dance and choreography as experiential yet performed by only experts and witnessed at a distance. By deploying dance in new ways in immersive

performance, artists are creating new models of audience engagement and expanding

parameters, to rearticulate what we understand as dance spectatorship.

In considering how dance is used with the three case studies presented here, I present

a stance that claims that dance in immersive performance is "both-and," meaning that

dance is both displays of spectacular virtuosity and processes of subtle manipulation,

both a controlled system of movement and a mode for movement experimentation and

discovery, both narrative representation and physical expression. This dissertation

contributes to the field of international dance, theater, and performance studies through

the ways in which it centralizes dance in the discourse surrounding immersive

performance; in addition, it contributes perspectives of dance to immersive performance

that have heretofore been largely missing. Issues and insights that emerge from this

research, such as how dance is being deployed in immersive performance to define new

parameters for audience engagement, may resonate with theorists and practitioners in

contemporary performance and the fields of audience, media, cultural, and theater

studies, furthering analyses of dance in discussions that can yield continued insight for

those dedicated to the discipline of dance through both practice and scholarship.

Chapter Overview

In Chapter II, I present the historical and theoretical frameworks for the dissertation.

After identifying historical precedents from the twentieth century for dance and

immersive performance, I define the terms currently used by artistic directors, dancers,

and audiences of immersive work. Through discussion of the extant research on audience

engagement and theories of coauthorship, I consider how dance and immersive

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performance offer opportunities for new forms of engagement and the changing roles of audiences in twenty-first-century live performance settings.

In Chapter III, I discuss the research methodology I employed, a multicase study, as well as research tools, including participant observation and interviews. I highlight the importance of working with three different groups of research participants—artistic directors, dancers, and audiences—to collect data through interviews that reflects multiple perspectives about dance and immersive performance. In addition, I describe themes that emerged from the data gathered and analyzed from primary and secondary sources.

In Chapter IV, a case study of *Sleep No More*, I analyze how Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle, artistic directors of Punchdrunk, designed their production to include dance while achieving their mission of situating audiences as agents of their own experiences. I argue that *Sleep No More* can be understood as a *tandem dance*, in that dance is the primary medium for structuring the content delivered by the paid, professional dancers and as an improvisational method to encourage movement experiences for audiences.

In Chapter V, a case study of *Then She Fell*, I describe how Zach Morris, Tom Pearson, and Jennine Willett, the artistic directors of Third Rail Projects, developed an *action framework* that is precisely designed to immerse audiences. The action framework functions as an apparatus of capture, following Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari, because of the ways it "captures" audiences into participating and interacting with

dancers during performances through character-driven choreography and structures of proposal and response.

Chapter VI, a case study of *Dance Marathon*, reveals how bluemouth inc. *actuate* their audiences—that is, set audiences in motion—to provide opportunities for audiences to generate and coauthor dance during performances. In ways that mirror bluemouth inc.'s dedication to the coauthorial practices of collective creation yet with crucial differences, their production of *Dance Marathon* makes space for and prioritizes the meaningful contributions of all participants.

In Chapter VII, I discuss the three productions in relation to one another to highlight how dance is currently contributing to the field of immersive performance, in particular the use of strategies derived from choreography to enhance immersion as an effect of live performance. This concluding chapter reflects upon the implications of the productions for both dance and immersive performance and suggests future routes for further research on dance and immersive performance.

CHAPTER II

FRAMEWORKS FOR DANCE AND IMMERSIVE PERFORMANCE

Immersive. Since the 1980s in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, this word has been associated with processes of audience engagement in popular forms of culture, including dance, theater, performance, video gaming, and Internet-based entertainment. As a term, it has gained prominence across multiple genres, among them artistic practices, scholarly research, and marketing. The success of the productions *Sleep No More*, *Then She Fell*, and *Dance Marathon*, and the central role of dance in them, suggests that further investigation of how artistic directors, dancer/performers, and audiences understand the integration of dance and immersive practices can benefit the fields of both dance and immersive performance by broadening and deepening the discourse that surrounds them. As a foundation for this investigation I pursued a line of inquiry that includes the following: identification of the influences that have contributed to the merging of dance and immersive practices in performance; analyses of the ways in which dance and immersive practices, as well as notions of interactivity and participation, are conceptualized and integrated in productions by artistic directors and dancer/performers; and consideration of the responses of audiences to works merging dance and immersive practices.

With the aim of establishing a foundation from which to address these concerns, I consider the terms currently used by artistic directors, dancer/performers, and audiences

of work that integrates dance and immersive performance to distinguish them from work employing other practices. Then I identify particular trends and movements that developed in the twentieth century within the disciplines of dance, performance art, and theater that can be considered historical precedents for dance and immersive performance. By introducing perspectives on audience engagement as developed by scholars researching live performance, as well as television, I contextualize my analyses of the changing roles of audiences in twenty-first-century live performance settings. Last, I show how the research on authorship and coauthorship in the twentieth century provides a theoretical foundation from which to consider how dance and immersive performance is enabling alternative forms of engagement.

Considering Terms: *Immersive, Spectating* and *Liveness, Audience Participation*

Immersion comes from the late Latin *immergere*, with origins as a noun of action meaning "to plunge into, to submerge," and it is through the body that immersion's ontology is understood. All live performance experiences—dance, theater, music, circus, performance art, and others—can engender degrees of immersion and participation for audiences. Indeed, it would seem that to immerse audiences—that is, to have them become completely involved with and absorbed in an artistic work—would be a goal for all artists making live performance. However, in current discourse surrounding live performance, the term *immersion* is used specifically to define changing notions of spectating, liveness, and audience participation.

Immersive Theater and Immersive Performance

The term *immersive* as a descriptor has been associated with video gaming, 3-D

cinema, and other entertainment forms since the 1980s. Josephine Machon, theater

scholar and author of *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary*

Performance, asserts that as a descriptor it was used in the field of live performance as

early as 1995, although she cites 2004 as the year in which the term *immersive theater*

permeated both artistic practices and academia.[3] Machon suggests that immersive theater

became recognized as a distinct practice with recognizable features between 2005 and

2010. Since 2012, the phrase *immersive performance* has replaced *immersive theater*,

particularly in scholarly research, suggesting a wider recognition of the ways in which

multiple disciplines and strategies, including dance, are employed to contribute to the

immersion of audiences.

Machon suggests that identifying immersive performance by three central features is

preferable to establishing a finite definition. First, Machon states that "the physical

insertion and direct participation of the audience member in the work must be a vital

component and is a defining feature" of immersive performance. Machon calls the

audience "an interactive agent" and suggests that it is "absolutely central to the

movement/physicality and sensual design of the event" (2013, 57). Second, in immersive

performance, "there is a prioritization of the sensual world that is unique to each

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[3] Machon suggests that *immersive* was inserted into the lexicon of live performance in the
United Kingdom by Michael Morris and James Lingwood, co–artistic directors of the
London-based Artangel, when they "explicitly used the term to describe their 1995
production of *H.G.*, a performance installation created by Robert Wilson and Hans Peter
Kuhn" (Machon 2013, 63).

immersive event," which is necessary, Machon suggests, for an audience member to perceive that "she or he inhabits the immersive world created" (67). Third, Machon speaks about the significant role of space and place in immersive design, including the "architectural details and design" of the venue used for performance as well as the ways in which artists might "incorporate a focus on geographical location, community and local culture, history and politics" (70). The word *immersive* is employed to describe both the practices that artists use to develop immersive productions and the productions themselves. The immersive practices chosen, and the productions that emerge from those practices, reflect the aesthetic and philosophical perspectives of these artists, whose intention it is to design live performance events that involve the participation of audiences.

Spectating and Liveness

Ideas about spectating, liveness, and audience participation provide important contextual information that sketches the social and media climate in which immersive performance grew to prominence. There are many words and phrases to describe performance that prioritizes the participation of audiences, and their use varies, depending upon the cultural context and how artists are applying them in the creation of productions and implementation of performances. First, there are the terms *spectator* and *audience*; the former is more in use in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, while *audience* tends to be preferred in the United States. The terms differ etymologically— *spectator* is from *spectate*, meaning "viewer or watcher," and *audience* is from *audientia*, "to hear." However, the two terms are now conflated, and their contemporary use

includes an understanding that multiple senses are at play when individuals engage in activities as spectators and audiences.

Interactive-art scholars Alison Oddey and Christine White suggest that because of advances in technology and communication in the twenty-first century, spectating is now an activity beyond viewing or watching. In *Modes of Spectating*, they assert that "the new definition of spectatorship is interactivity. It is the combination of hearing and observation and it has fewer of the negative connotations of the late twentieth century ideas of passive viewing" (2009, 13). Oddey and White make particular note of youth culture and its use of media, entertainment, and video gaming, claiming that these practices "require consideration of the pleasures of spectating…alongside the pleasures of participation" (9). Spectating and participation are conflated for Oddey and White and because of this, they outline many possible modes of spectating, including television, the Internet, film, gaming, theater, headsets, mobile phones, and computers. Emphasizing that spectating now "covers a whole range of observational activities" (14), they note that it is necessary to consider how spectating across mediums affects our understanding of content.

The conceptualization of the terms *spectator* and *spectating* as offered by Oddey and White is instrumental in the context of immersive performance, when understanding the design of performances and what is offered to audiences in watching, listening, doing, and taking action. When considering the notions of spectator and spectating in a wider context, such as that of sporting events, we can take stock of the ways in which such events can enable audience participation—notably, in cheering, flag waving, and dancing

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(the wave). While not all spectators will be participatory, Oddey and White's conceptualization of spectating suggests that through spectating, audiences, if not already participating, are at least setting themselves up for participation.

American scholar of media and cultural studies Elizabeth Klaver has examined notions of spectatorial gaze, particularly those developed by film theorists in the 1970s, such as suture theory, and extruded them through the "plurality of the media culture" to consider new ways of looking during live performance (1995, 310). Suture theory, developed in 1966 by psychoanalyst Jacques-Alain Miller, following Jacques Lacan, is "the processes by which we are 'stitched into' the story-world, or 'fabric,' of a film…taking up positions as 'subjects-within-the-film' such that we experience the film-world as an enclosed world unto itself" (Nowlan 2006). In 1975 film theorist Laura Mulvey deconstructed suture theory from a feminist perspective in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," asserting that it implies an individualistic action of identifying with a cinematic character through the deployment of a power-laden, singularized, gender-specific male gaze. Klaver, chiefly concerned with how spectators and practices and theories of the gaze are changed through a multiplicity of "looking structures" suggests that in the age of media culture, everyone is positioned at an "intersection of viewing positions" (Klaver 1995, 310–311). With this assertion, Klaver fractures the spectatorial gaze as defined by Mulvey as singular, masterful, and potentially imbricated in sexual or political agendas, adding that "the theory of a single gaze, medium, and subject has never been able adequately to account for the ways viewers *will* find to watch" (320).

By engaging in an increasingly intertextual and mediated world, Klaver believes, spectators are exerting "agency by performing in the viewing situation, by bringing a history of media and life experiences to whatever show [they are] watching." Klaver views performance as an "articulated network of signs, gazes, and looks, or in semiotic terms, as discourses acting on a world"; thus spectators, when released from theories from film and cinema that would restrict them in passive roles, can equally "act on the world" (311). She recognizes that film theory, in adhering to suture theory, does not admit "the possibility of a returned gaze," ultimately forcing the viewer to be stuck in one viewing perspective and therefore unable to be agentive in the performative modality she suggests is now available (311). The culture of new media, by nature of its multiple viewing structures, requires viewers to return the gaze, allowing them to transition into a more powerful role as performing spectators.

This is particularly the case in structures of looking in theater; Klaver describes "theatre's spillage of looks" as an inherent obstacle to the idea of an overall, authoritative gaze (314). I support her concept of the spectator as a *bricoleur* and the notion that it is mediated environments, social media practices, and the new media culture that have allowed the twenty-first-century bricoleur to evolve, via the gathering of information and experiences through performative modalities rather than a spectatorial gaze (317).[4]

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[4] The French *bricoleur* derives from the verb *bricoler*. A bricoleur in the realms of performance and fine arts is someone who engages in artistic practice by creating cultural products from what is available—found objects and materials may be used through techniques of collage, assemblage, and other means to make something new. In the view of Klaver, the spectator engages in a process of bricolage, assembling knowledge from multiple sources.

Klaver suggests that "playful intersections" between media enable the "shredding of boundaries," which allows viewers to see "the deconstructions and alterities of media performing one another" (318). These different ways of looking can liberate spectators from passivity while offering opportunities for them to reconsider the implications of sexuality, power, and the returned gaze within modes of spectating. Through these tactics, Klaver's "making something happen in the space between viewer and viewed" is a qualitatively different process and product, and the art itself is that which emerges through the agency of individuals and the interactions between people, media, and elements in live performance (315).

Alongside Klaver's notions, the assertion of performance theorist Philip Auslander that the "televisual has become the intrinsic and determining element of our cultural formation" is key when considering how media is changing the relationship of audiences to live performance—dance, music, theater, and mixed-media performance (Auslander 1999, 2). Auslander suggests that "the live is actually an effect of mediation," pointing out that before the invention of recording devices, there was no distinction of "live" performance, because it was the only known possibility (51), and Auslander claims that a relationship of "mutual dependence, not precession," exists between mediatized and live performance (53). He notes that the pressure of economic competition has challenged the very nature and existence of live performance and that, in response, live performance has increasingly become more like mediatized entertainment in an effort to survive and thrive. The producers of cultural products, particularly live performance, recognize that the intimacy afforded through televisual modes of communication is not simply

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accepted—it is ingrained and prioritized in our viewing structures. Auslander references philosopher Walter Benjamin's notion of a "mass desire for proximity" as an attraction to both the televisual and to reproduced objects that we can create or possess (35). It is important in the context of this study to consider that liveness takes on new significance and implications when it is expanded beyond the liveness and aliveness of performers and performance to the liveness and aliveness of spectators and audiences.

Audience Participation and Participatory Arts Practices

In presenting the term *audience participation*, I acknowledge that audiences of all genres of live performance engage in various processes of observation and reception, so audience participation is always already happening to some extent. As theater scholar Gareth White states, "Without participation performance would be nothing but action happening in the presence of other people" (2013, 3). Yet White also asserts in his *Audience Participation in Theatre: The Aesthetics of the Invitation* that "there are few things in the theatre that are more despised than audience participation" (1). The difference here, then, is that White is referring to the notion that for some people, audience participation is equivalent to public humiliation. Given the inherent power differential during moments of audience participation in live performance—in that the performer has knowledge of the event and thus all the power and the audience possesses little of either—most individuals are understandably reluctant to be singled out from a crowd in which they are comfortably and safely settled. However, as evidenced in the historical precedents offered, there is a long history of audiences being invited into and contributing to the action of live performance, and the practice continues in contemporary

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performance to differing degrees and with various outcomes. This necessitates clarification of the term moving forward.

In the context of this study, I will use the term *audience participation*, following Gareth White, to mean "the participation of an audience or audience member, in the action of a performance" (4). Theater historian Lynne Connor has established that citizens in the early twentieth century learned a set of socially constructed, acceptable audience behaviors, and this definition assumes that the participation of the spectator goes beyond such behavior in theatrical contexts so that the spectator can engage in action *as framed* by the artists (110). This idea that the action is framed by the artists is key to both works intended to enable audience participation and works of immersive performance. In her edited collection *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance*, American theater scholar Susan Kattwinkel presents terminology that aligns with this stance of the artists' intentionally framing a work for audience engagement: "Either the performance is structured to include audience members, or the performance was created with the help of potential audience members, in concert with the artists, or greatly altered following audience response. Others of these performances were created with a very specific audience in mind, and have no purpose for existence without the spiritual and vocal presence of that specific audience" (2003, x). Although Kattwinkel uses *audience participation* rather than *immersive performance*, she focuses on the same phenomena as does Machon, which is to say they are both examining works in which audiences participate and that are made by "artists who account for their audiences in every step of the creation and performance process" (x). The word *immersive* appears in

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Kattwinkel's collection yet only in reference to technology and role-playing games online, rather than to live performance productions.[5]

Shifting from theoretical precedents of current audience participatory practices to focus on current research data allows me to contemporize the discussion of engagement through data collection and analysis aimed at clarifying the shifts in participation in the arts. *Getting In on the Act: How Arts Groups Are Creating Opportunities for Active Participation* (Brown and Novak-Leonard 2011), published by the James Irvine Foundation, has been called the first comprehensive study on participatory arts practices in the United States. While the study does not provide a finite definition for participatory arts practices, it states that there is a "seismic shift toward a participatory arts culture [in which]...people are engaging in the arts in increasingly active and expressive ways" (David Gauntlett quoted in Brown and Novak-Leonard 2011, 2). In support of that statement, the study introduces the Audience Involvement Spectrum (see Appendix A), a model for analyzing emerging trends in arts engagement that describes a progression of involvement from "'spectating'"—in which the audience member plays only a minor role in shaping the artistic experience"—to where the boundaries between audience and performer are eliminated through full participation by all present in the creative processes (15).[6] Here we see a chasm between how Oddey and White conceptualize spectating and how spectating is presented in *Getting In on the Act*. While the terms are used differently,

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[5] The term *immersive* appears in LeNoir 2003, 125.
[6] For further explanation of examples of audience involvement, including crowdsourcing, co-creation, and "audience-as-artist," whereby participants are involved in creating and directing the outcome of a production, see Brown and Novak-Leonard 2011, 16–17.

the overall message seems to be the same. *Getting In on the Act* discusses how participatory arts fit into a larger cultural context, which is affected by the diversification of population in the United States. Diversification, in turn, has led to different forms of cultural production and consumption as well as increased interactivity with Web 2.0. This framework presents a model in which participatory arts practices are both acknowledged and situated alongside professional cultural goods and services within a larger sphere of cultural literacy (7).[7]

Getting In on the Act proposes participatory practices as higher-level engagement in the arts for the ways in which it "paints a more nuanced and multi-layered picture of arts participation, including and validating parts of the ecosystem that were previously invisible" (7). Subsequent to the release of *Getting In on the Act*, Shelly Gilbride, a dancer, choreographer, and scholar and a partner in the research for the study, posed important questions stemming from research on participatory arts practices and its relation to the dance field. Gilbride asked, "What are the consequences to craft, technique and training? How does a dance artist engage with the public in dance-making and also maintain a sense of artistic empowerment? Can a dance artist maintain a sense of artistic integrity and create an atmosphere that encourages participation?" (Gilbride 2011). Gilbride's questions presuppose certain values in the dance field, which may or may not be representative of the dance artists working with immersive practices. The second

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[7] The framework in *Getting In on the Act* was adapted from the Creative Community Index, developed by arts researchers John Kreidler and Philip Trounstine in 2005. Kriedler and Trounstine define cultural literacy as "fluency in traditions, esthetics, manners, customs, language and the arts, and the ability to apply critical thinking and creativity to these elements" (Brown and Leonard-Novac 2011, 43).

question in particular presents the notion that dance artists/choreographers prioritize maintaining an authorial role within their dance making, which is not a universal goal for all.

As Gilbride notes, the report challenges "the ingrained cultural hierarchy that prioritizes traditional spectator experiences" (Gilbride 2011). Her questioning itself suggests the difficulty in reframing the cultural hierarchies that have shaped the field of dance in order to understand the role of dance and immersive practices. Referring back to Kattwinkel's definition of audience participation in performance, it is possible to see how it aligns with what WolfBrown defines in *Getting In on the Act* as "participation in service of an artistic process or product" that includes "situations in which audience members are allowed to 'co-create' aspects of the artistic experience, or actually create the art. In these programs the participatory activity, however cursory or deep, is in service of a professionally curated artistic outcome" (Brown and Novak-Leonard 2011, 14). Within the category of "participation in the service of an artistic process or product" there exist the specific practices of crowdsourcing, that is, when an audience becomes activated in choosing or contributing materials such as a text, visual art, or movement toward an artistic product, and co-creation, when audience members contribute something to an artistic experience as curated by a professional artist (4).

In the context of the individuals for whom immersive performance is designed, I contend that neither *spectators* nor *audience* is a sufficient descriptor and that we do not

yet have an adequate term to refer to these individuals.[8] *Audience*, from *audient*, still

reflects its root in hearing and listening. Oddey and White's expansion of *spectator* and

spectating, while suggesting the body, does not go far enough to include the extent to

which the physically active body is necessary in immersive performance. Machon has

coined the term *immersant* (2013, 3) to describe those engaging in immersive theater, but

this strikes me as passive. What is needed is a word that addresses the bodily, kinesthetic

experience and the kinesthetic responses required of individuals engaging in immersive

performance. With this in mind, I use *spectators*, *audience*, and *audience participants*

interchangeably in my study, with the acknowledgment that none of these fully describes

the expectations of individuals engaging with and in immersive performance.

Immersion as a practice in live performance has been happening or at least been the

intention of artists throughout history. Clearly, artists want audiences to be absorbed by

the artistic products the former put forth and have experimented with for a long time.

While the artists in this study take a different perspective on the audience, namely, how

to design productions to focus upon the audience and their abilities to include themselves

within performances through active decision making, their efforts can be best understood

through a discussion of the historical precedents that have established the foundation

permitting this experimentation to occur.

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[8] Jay Rosen, media critic, writer, and professor of journalism at New York University, remarked, "The people formerly known as the audience wish to inform the media people of our existence, and of a shift in power that goes along with the platform shift you've all heard about. The people formerly known as the audience are simply *the public* made realer, less fictional, more able, less predictable. You should welcome that, media people. But whether you do or not we want you to know we're here" (2006; italics in the original).

Historical Precedents for Dance and Immersive Practices

Although the debate around these terms is a contemporary one, performance

practices that include the interactive and participatory engagement of audiences have a

long lineage based in ceremonial, ritual, and performance events. To understand these

practices, it is necessary to accept that they are continually changing even as they are

initiated. In addition, the strategies deployed in creating and realizing the performances

resulting from these practices can be as diverse as the artists and audiences involved.

While a comprehensive chronology of audience engagement practices is not possible

within the scope of this research, an overview of the concepts of interactivity and

participation as they have been conceived and implemented in dance, theater, music, and

performance art allows me to suggest historical and theoretical connections to the work

of artists who integrate dance and immersive performance. In this section, I use the terms

participation, *engagement*, and *interactivity* rather than *immersive*, since this last term

was not prevalent until the first decade of the twenty-first century.

In her essay "In and out of the Dark: A Theory about Audience Behavior from

Sophocles to Spoken Word," theater historian Lynne Connor cites critical moments of

audience agency in the theatrical events of ancient Greece, Renaissance Italy and France,

and Elizabethan England. Connor describes spectators' ability to move through space to

establish sight lines and their sense of freedom in vocally expressing their pleasure and

displeasure with the content of the performance during the event. Connor presents these

examples to set up her analysis of the pacification of twentieth-century audiences, as

enabled by two developments, one technological and the other sociopolitical. In the

former, the invention and installation of electric lights in theaters in the early 1800s allowed designers to distinguish the space of the stage from where the audience was seated in the house. The use of electric lights to illuminate the stage literally and figuratively put audiences in the dark by "transform[ing] the playhouse…from a site of assembly…to one of quiet reception" (2008, 110). In being relegated to the dark, audiences learned that their own inquiry and discussion was irrelevant compared with what was offered by the artists on stage. The artists, including the director, were elevated through not only lighting but also architecture and new marketing and publicity, making them seem larger than life, almost omniscient.

The ways in which technology shaped new distinctions in the roles and status of audience and artist are linked directly with how which sociopolitical factors influenced cultural change. Connor describes systematic efforts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to establish cultural hierarchies that eventually created the binaries of "high" and "low" art, segregating individuals into sociopolitical strata based on their adherence to appropriate—that is, quiet, composed, and reverent—audience behaviors. Twentieth-century audiences were "conditioned to wait to receive meaning" and lost "sovereignty over their own cultural choices and the attendance authority to ascribe meaning in a publicly valued manner" (115). Throughout the twentieth century, one can track the development of artists and artistic movements that emerged to push against sociopolitical conditioning through experiments designed to question and deconstruct notions of power and propriety that affected access to and engagement with the arts.

British art historian and critic Claire Bishop identifies two distinct approaches that took shape in the milieu of arts events in Europe during the 1920s and that continue to influence participatory practices to this day. She describes them alternately as "an authored tradition that seeks to provoke participants, and a de-authored lineage that aims to embrace collective creativity; one," she continues, "is disruptive and interventionist, the other constructive and ameliorative" (2006, 11).[9] Bishop states that in the artistic movements of the 1920s "the displacement of time and space was an artistic strategy" and artists working at that time "proposed a vision of art that was no longer a finite object, but rather a time-based experience" (11). In light of the approaches advanced by Bishop, I suggest that a continuum of interactive and participatory art can been identified throughout the twentieth century, from early experiments to processes of immersive practice that persist into the present. In what follows I point to several examples that are situated along this continuum, between authored works on one end and de-authored works at the other.

Beginning with the avant-garde movements of the 1920s, the Futurists and the Dadaists put on events that contained political and absurdist content and were intended to provoke audiences. While these groups could never be sure of the types of responses they would receive from audiences, responses—even chaotic and violent responses—were

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[9] What I am researching is different from the social practice or participatory arts described by Bishop as embodied in works that emphasize "collaboration and the collective dimension of social experience" (10). In the United Kingdom, participatory art is understood as a social practice with political intentions; Bishop discusses the practices of artists working in this realm as "striving to collapse the distinction between performer and audience, professional and amateur, production and reception" (11).

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both welcomed and sought. Their events represent the approach described by Bishop as "disruptive and interventionist" (11). Reflecting this approach, the Italian poet and Futurist leader Filippo Tommaso Marinetti proclaimed that he wished to "orchestrate the audience's sensibilities like a symphony, probing and reanimating the most sluggish depths of their being, by every possible means, [and] abolish the barrier of the footlights by launching networks of sensation, back and forth, between stage and audience; the action on stage will spill out into the auditorium to involve the spectators" (2006, 206). Perhaps the most notorious event staged by Marinetti—one that provoked violence between spectators and Futurists in attendance—occurred in Venice in 1910, when Marinetti and fellow Futurists dropped thousands of copies of his *Manifesto against Past-Loving Venice* from the top of the clock tower of Piazza San Marco onto spectators below (Cohen 2004, 156).

Early events of the Zurich-based Dadaists were staged at the Cabaret Voltaire by German poet Hugo Ball and also sought to instigate a strong public response. For example, in his 1916 performance of *Flucht aus der Zeit* (*Flight out of Time*), Ball wore a cardboard costume he had created to resemble the cloak of an archbishop and chanted a nonsensical sound poem intended to question the sanctity of religious language. Tristan Tzara, another Dadaist, who witnessed the performance, described the audience as working itself into a fever and tearing at Ball's costume (Young 1981, 20). The Dadaists intended their performances to incite audiences to the point that the performers' noise and actions would eclipse the content delivered. Tzara, who staged the first Festival of Dada at the Salle Gaveau in Paris in May 1920, described the audience's reaction: "People

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threw at us, not only eggs, salads and pennies, but beefsteaks as well. It was a great success" (28). After such performances, audience discomfort at what they perceived to be nonsense or blasphemy sent them out into the streets in varying states of unrest (Groys 2008, 25). What audience members did next was of little concern to the Dadaists; the point was to activate audiences and move them beyond what the Dadaists perceived to be the complacency and passivity of the bourgeois.

In the 1930s, German dramatist Bertolt Brecht and French playwright and drama theorist Antonin Artaud were both exploring the engagement of audiences, albeit through different tactics. Working against the practice of naturalism in theater in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which audiences would "lose" themselves emotionally in a work, Brecht developed his concept of *Verfremdungseffekt*, an alienation or distancing effect. Brecht believed that audiences should be cognizant at all times that they were watching a theatrical production so they would better engage in critical analyses of the content of the performance. To implement Verfremdungseffekt, Brecht introduced devices such as breaking the fourth wall of the theater to speak to audiences, known as "direct address," and orchestrated scene changes in full view of the audience, to let spectators "observe that this is not magic but work" (Mcauley 2008, 287).

Artaud, like Brecht interested in nonrealistic drama, created his "theater of cruelty," which he manifested as both philosophy and practice in writings and live performance events based on his belief that "our sensibility has reached the point where we surely need theatre that wakes us up heart and nerves" (Artaud 2014, 31). In 1931, Artaud witnessed a Balinese theater group perform at the Paris Colonial Exposition, and their

dancing left an indelible impression. Later he wrote of "the feeling of a new bodily language no longer based on words but on signs which emerges through the maze of gestures, postures" (Artaud quoted by Savarese and Fowler 2001, 51). Combining movement with lighting and sound, Artaud commenced with creating productions imbued with dark imagery and presenting fantastic sets, with the intention of disorientating audiences and evoking dreamlike atmospheres and trance states in which various physical responses and reactions would be possible.

Modern dance emerged as a new and distinct art form in the early part of the twentieth century alongside the work of the Futurists and Dadaists through the choreographic inventions of Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan, and Ruth St. Denis and the experiments of German dance artists. Fuller had a profound effect on Marinetti; she inspired the writing of his *Manifesto of Futurist Dance* in 1917, in which he proclaimed she was preferred by Futurists because of her use of technology, namely, incandescent lights, and fabric to create abstract imagery through dance, rather than narrative representation (Merwin 1998, 79). Duncan's experiments in dance were conscious breaks with traditional forms and techniques of expression, specifically those of European ballet. Duncan danced barefoot and performed in sites other than proscenium theaters, such as gardens, and in close proximity to audiences. In addition, her rejection of structures that denied women equal freedom in the early twentieth century situated her as an artist concerned with social justice. St. Denis, on the other hand, was searching for unity of consciousness and culture through the control of myth and tradition. Both Duncan and St. Denis were exploring structures through which audiences could connect to dance in new

ways—cognitively, aesthetically, spiritually, and kinesthetically. By developing new vocabularies, aesthetic visions, and presentation formats, Duncan and St. Denis brought about the emergence of new types of dance through which audiences in the United States and abroad were challenged to understand and spectate dance differently.

In the 1950s, the seminal works of composer John Cage and painter and pioneering performance artist Allan Kaprow explored practices of interactivity and participation and created new conceptions of coauthorship. Cage sought to "score silence" in his 1952 composition *4'33"*, which he composed as "an act of *framing*, of enclosing environmental and unintended sounds in a moment of attention in order to open the mind to the fact that all sounds are music" (Gann 2010, 11). By framing silence as having no intentional sounds, Cage hoped audiences would enter into their own processes of interpretation and discovery by listening to the ambient sound in the room, rather than being influenced by a composition he had written (Frieling 2008, 82). Kaprow's happenings demonstrated his interest in including the audience through participatory and interactive task-oriented assignments. Indeed, Kaprow's stance was that "there should not be (and usually cannot be) an audience or audiences to watch a happening. By willingly participating in a work, knowing the scenario and their own particular duties before-hand, people become a real and necessary part of the work. It cannot exist without them" (Kaprow 2003, 64). In Kaprow's happening called *Yard* (1961), the audience interacted freely within the piece. After filling the garden of the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York City with hundreds of used tires, Kaprow invited people to participate in such actions such as climbing and walking on the mounds and moving the tires around the space (Kaprow 1991).

In the late 1960s, theater director, scholar, and critic Richard Schechner coined the term *environmental theater* to name a genre in which he combined deconstructions of known dramatic texts with aspects of happenings, such as eliminating spatial divisions between audiences and performers and opening up possibilities for their interaction with one another and for audiences' participation in the action of the play.[10] Schechner's production of *Dionysus in '69* (*D69*), presented in New York City in 1968, is a seminal work of environmental theater: the classic Greek play *The Bacchae* by Euripides was deconstructed through an environment designed to allowed performers and audiences to participate. Following *D69*, Schechner establishing a set of rules for participation. First, the audience is in a living space and a living situation; things may happen to and with them as well as "in front" of them. Second, when a performer invites participation, he or she must be prepared to accept and deal with the spectators' reactions. Third, participation should not be gratuitous (Schechner 2000, 78). Some scholars have cited environmental theater—in both concept and practice—as a precursor of immersive theater. For one, Tobin Nellhaus, general editor of *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*,

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[10] *Promenade theater* is another form that emerged from Schechner's environmental theater, although it is not often used as a term in the United States. It is prevalent in the United Kingdom, used to describe works in which audiences are ambulatory. The key differences between promenade theater and environmental theater are the participation of the audience and conceptions of the site; environmental theater is designed to include the audience, whereas promenade theater may or may not be designed as such. In both forms, rather than being seated to watch a performance, spectators will stand or be guided through the action or follow the action of the performance.

defines *immersive theater* in the volume's glossary as "a recent expansion of environmental theatre" (McConachie, Nellhaus, Sonrgenfrei, and Underiner 2016, 599).[11]

In American dance during the 1960s, Cage inspired experiments in participatory and interactive practices and the questioning of relationships between performers and audience through his relationships with dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham and choreographer and dance educator Robert Ellis Dunn. Cunningham's artistic partnership with Cage and the integration of early chance operations in his choreographic processes had significant influence on the next wave of dance artists, known as the postmodernist generation. Dunn, inspired by Cage, founded a series of dance classes at Judson Church in New York City, where he encouraged his students to subvert existing principles of dance composition by applying iterations of Cage's concepts of chance operations. Dunn's classes enabled new pedagogical and artistic frameworks through which dance artists—among them Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, and Meredith Monk—questioned established choreographic processes. The events and happenings that emerged from these experiments at Judson Church irrevocably changed conceptions of dance in the United States and influenced the work of dance artists throughout Canada and the United Kingdom.

For example, the postmodernists were turning away from choreography that represented narrative and psychological themes, as found in the work of Martha Graham and other modernists of the previous generation. The postmodernist generation experimented with strategies in order to expand ideas about what dance was, how it could

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[11] See Machon 2013; McConachie et al. 2016, 599.

be presented, and who should dance. They brought the audience into closer proximity to them and stripped away theatrical conventions such as performing on a proscenium stage; they wore their personal clothes as opposed to elaborate costumes, worked with nonprofessionals as well as professionals, and limited the use theatrical lighting. One might argue that these changes were facilitated in part because of the lack of available resources (no money to pay dancers or to create costumes) and because of the architecture of Judson Church, which situated audiences at the same level as the dancers and had little in the way of theatrical lighting or production resources. While postmodernists were perhaps restricted by resources, their choices nonetheless differentiated them from their predecessors.

Bishop names activation, authorship, and community as the "most frequently cited motivations for almost all artistic attempts to encourage participation in art since the 1960s," and it is possible to trace how these agendas were explored in the work of postmodern dance artists (2006, 12). Activating different subjects to participate—through the use of nondancers and by allowing dancers to contribute to process rather than merely learning existing repertory—was a key component of the practices of many postmodern dance artists. The ideology that "any body/anybody can dance," which emerged from the postmodernists, grew from a collective mission to expand notions of beauty and equality but also from an interest in yielding control and authorship to achieve results not possible through other techniques and processes. I suggest that there are three strands of postmodernist dance practices that serve, to different degrees and extents, the work of artists who are integrating dance and immersive practices.

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First, by shifting from formalized technique to the incorporation of *pedestrian*

movement and practices of daily life, postmodernist dance artists investigated new

movement vocabularies that could be easily understood by audiences, both in practice

and interpretation, particularly if audience members or preselected, nonprofessional

dancers were enlisted as performers. In certain immersive productions, artistic directors

incorporate pedestrian movement and practices of daily life as modes through which

audiences participate in or gain access to performances. Second, explorations of

probability by postmodernists, popularized by Cunningham's experimentation with

chance operations, encouraged investigation of choreographic practices beyond formalist

compositional skills via experimental devices.[12] Probability and chance are in operation

in many immersive productions insofar as performance events are designed to allow for a

range of audience choices, which in turn affect how audiences experience the

performance. Third, dance in immersive practices prioritizes *site specificity*, *site*

sensitivity (including designed scenography), or both, to create possibilities for both

artists and spectators to experience spaces of performance differently via broadly

conceptualized ideas of proxemics and notions of intimacy.

In 1967 in "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes framed issues of authorial

control within cultural products by emphasizing the multiplicity and temporality of

meaning making. Barthes argues that "meaning [is] not dependent on authorial intent but

on the individual point of audience reception" (1978, 145). Barthes's conception of

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[12] I understand experimental devices within dance to be the use of chance operations
alongside the development of games, exercises, structures, tasks, and tools used in
various processes to generate and select movement.

"Author," when believed in, "is always conceived of as the past" while the modern scriptor is "born simultaneously with the text" and actualized in the creation of the product (145). In his describing text as "eternally written here and now," Barthes's idea of a modern scriptor is prescient when one considers contemporaneous cultural production and how ideas and material can be posted and shared immediately (here and now) while data seems to be "forever" (eternally) available on the Internet (145).

Barthes discusses the notion that a "text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (146), and I extend this beyond language to include quotations from across cultures as they are embodied and physiologically understood. At the end of his essay, Barthes again discusses multiplicity as being core to writing; text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of "dialogue, parody and contestation," but centralizes the "multiplicity" of meaning making within the reader rather than the author (148).

Barthes frames writing and reception as active, drawing upon J. L. Austin's ideas of the performative utterance, or speech that carries out action, developed a decade earlier (145). While Barthes is furthering his argument on the need to set right the misconception of the author as the sole maker of meaning, he also is exploring the idea of performatives as acts that—because of their subjective nature—cannot be evaluated based on truth. Barthes recognizes that in incorporating the idea of performatives, the meaning of text cannot have its truth established by the author, as the text exists in a realm that necessitates varied processes of interpretation and reception.

Italian author and philosopher Umberto Eco's essay "The Poetics of the Open Work," of 1962, is credited with promoting Barthes's theory by expanding reader response beyond Barthes's references in literature and moving such response into the arena of performance, specifically music, by asserting that "every reception of a work in art is both an interpretation and a performance of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself" (Eco 1989, 4). Eco described the idea of "open works" in his essay as more "open in a far more tangible sense" than simply the possibilities of audience interpretation and linked it to something akin to the "components of a construction kit" (4). The idea of open works has been referred to alternatively as "open systems" with an emphasis on creating environments within which participants can contribute. In his essay Eco centralizes artists/performers as agentive, noting that by leaving a work open they place themselves at "the focal point of a network of limitless interrelations," and myriad examples of versions of open works have manifested across artistic genres over the twentieth and into the early twenty-first century (23). Beyond these classifications, additional ways of conceiving participation were explored during the mid- and late twentieth century: interactivity via other persons and media; implicating the audience through agency and action; works and processes that reveal the "presence or trace of a visitor" (23); and the emergence of art-by-instruction pieces through visual artist Sol LeWitt, whose experiments "legitimized the linguistic formulation of an idea as artwork" (41). Immersive performances play at the edge of open and closed texts, freely mingling aspects of each in designs that require audiences to learn in the moment of doing how to negotiate their movement and choices during an event.

Audience Engagement in the Performing Arts

Immersive performances, while drawing from historical precedents, create new sites of engagement and initiate new discussions that reform discourses around audiences and engagement. In her *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance*, Machon speaks of an emerging "performance style" that establishes an "experiential audience event via the recreation of visceral experience" and that "places emphasis on the human body as a primary force of signification and utilizes the ever-increasing possibilities in design and technology" (2009, 1). To analyze this new performance style, Machon draws upon the work of neurocognitive scientists studying synaesthesia, a condition in which "one modality (e.g. hearing) produce sensations in another modality (e.g. colour)" ("What Is Synaesthesia?" 2015). Machon combines research about synaesthesia with her ideas of embodiment during live performance to develop her theory of "(syn)aesthetics." Machon uses this term to describe this new form of performance—as well as the phrase "(syn)aesthetic style"—to explain how audiences have "fused corporeal and cerebral experiences" during a work that is "shifting between sensual and intellectual, the somatic…and the semantic" (2009, 4).

In *(Syn)aesthetics*, Machon sets out her definitions of visceral experience, which she further clarifies with additional definitions, key terms, and theoretical perspectives for immersive theater (a phrase she uses interchangeably with *immersive performance*) in *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (Machon 2013). This text serves as a comprehensive, polyvalent approach to immersive performance and an important resource for my research for the ways in which we are

similarly approaching terms and her identification of theorists to which I will also

connect. Most important, Machon centralizes the body—the bodies of performers and

audiences—in immersive performance, by asserting that "the interacting body of the

audience is as vital to the performance as that of the performer" (98). While Machon

mentions dance, her emphasis—following her theory of synaesthetics—is on the

sensorium of the body, particularly the body of the spectator, rather than on dance as a

specific contributor to immersion, when she describes how five senses interact with one

another to affect cognition, physiology, and emotion.[13] Machon's research provides a

foundation from which I extend the discussion of the body through what I believe to be

specific and specialized roles of dance in the creation and presentation of immersive

performance. From Machon, it seems necessary to acknowledge the link between the

kinesthetic ontology of dance and the body. The kinesthetic *is* a sensorium and the term

immersive is useful in encompassing that sensorium. According to philosopher Maxine

Sheets-Johnstone, dance is "thinking in movement" and thus dance and the body are

inextricably linked to the concept of immersion, serving as they do multiple roles as

subject, object, content, context, and process during the acts of perceiving and

interpreting immersive performance (2009, 28).

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[13] My understanding of *sensorium* is informed by the writings of Marshall McLuhan, the philosopher of communication theory, as documented by philosopher and scholar Norm Friesen: "McLuhan understood the senses as constituting a kind of synaesthetic system, a 'five sense sensorium' (1961) in which individual senses are in intricate 'interplay.'" McLuhan often speaks of the impressions on one sense being "translated" readily into another, of "sight translated into sound and sound translated into movement, and taste and smell" (McLuhan quoted in Friesen 2009, 1).

Dance

Australian choreographer and dance scholar Clare Dyson's 2010 dissertation, "Performing the Unutterable: Mapping the Experiential in Contemporary Dance," is the most comprehensive research that I have found to date that specifically addresses audience engagement within the field of dance. Dyson's dissertation focuses on her own practice-based research as a dance artist whose choreographies served as experiments for "re-examining and manipulating the traditional presentation paradigm for viewing Western contemporary dance" (Dyson 2010, 5). For example, Dyson's 2009 *Voyeur* was a project in which two dancers were contained in a box placed in the center of a proscenium stage. Audiences were invited onto the stage, where they were informed they could travel around the box and watch the performance through multiple peepholes, situated at various heights and locations. Headphones attached to the outside walls provided a soundtrack, which was the inner narrative of either one of the two dancers. Audience members could choose to listen to either of the narratives for as long as they wished. It is through projects such as *Voyeur* and its "alternative framework of presentation" (5) that Dyson has come to a definition of the "traditional presentation paradigm" (28) that serves as a point of reference against which to consider how the artists featured in my research are working. Dyson states, "The traditional presentation paradigm in which much current artistic dance is presented, supports work that is made to be received by a seated audience, who are in the dark, front facing with restricted or no agency. This presentation paradigm supports dance works that are usually 60–90 minutes in length and created tour-ready for equivalent theatrical architecture" (28).

In this definition, Dyson identified characteristics against which she wanted to push when considering new models of audience engagement in her choreographic projects. She then developed a series of scales to assist her in identifying a range of processes with which to experiment. For example, she situated a characteristic from the definition—such as the frontal presentation of dance in proscenium theater—at one end of the scale and, at the other end, what she perceived as its "opposite," for example, site specificity. In between the two points, Dyson identified a range of possibilities she planned to explore, such as varied seating in the round and promenade options for the audience, as in the example above. The various concepts that Dyson considered when establishing these scales—her conceptualizations of site and space for presenting dance, her application of the concept of liminality within performance to describe ambiguous states of being for audiences, and her differentiation of diverse modes of performance (virtuosic, task based, authentic)—mirrored what I identified as essential to consider during my research into dance and immersive performance.

<div align="center">Theater</div>

When it was first published in 1997, Susan Bennett's *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* was the first text to comprehensively examine the audience at the intersection of critical theory and theatrical practice. Bennett's work created a powerful and significant discourse around audience reception of performance and her work is widely cited by scholars and practitioners across artistic genres. Bennett's theorization of the "audience as cultural phenomenon" is underscored by her consideration of the rise of the director and the prioritization of production over textual

<div align="center">40</div>

concerns throughout the twentieth century (S. Bennett 1997, 1). Across a broad spectrum of performance, Bennett emphasizes the work of "theorist-practitioners," including Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, Augusto Boal, Richard Schechner, and Judith Malina of the Living Theater (2). Personal interest in and research on "alternative theaters, where the spectator was, either explicitly or implicitly, a marked focus of the drama" was key to Bennett's theorizing, as were her detailed analyses of the theories of Brecht and reader response (vii). According to Bennett, Brecht's theories were prescient in their anticipation of a discourse around audiences that needed to happen in theater but did not materialize until later in the twentieth century. She argues that it is the continued debate around Brecht's verfremdungseffekt alongside his understanding of the "audience as always-already interpellated by ideology" that has centralized discussions about the audience in the theory and practice of contemporary performance (33). Alternately, Bennett suggests that the impact of reader response theory has been more limited because it "no longer occupies a place in critical theory," with the advancement of other approaches to reception (34).

The rise of performance theory and the application of semiology in theater are highlighted by Bennett for their impact on expanding investigation into audience reception. In theorizing audiences, Bennett has found most useful the efforts of performance theorists to advance beyond traditional theater scholarship and to consider human behavior, sociology, and psychology as parts of a methodological base for performance theory. Because Schechner's projects "demonstrate an interplay of the sociological and the theatrical," Bennett cites him as an exemplar, someone who

reconsidered audiences through his writings and experiments with his company, the Performance Group (11). In his "real time audiences" project in 1977, Schechner defined "real time" audiences as those invited to the theater at the same time as the performers and experienced the theatrical event as everything that a production entails, from start to finish (11). More conventionally, "regular time" audiences arrived at the advertised curtain time. Schechner's goal was for both performers and audiences to be "aware of the overlapping but conceptually distinct realities of drama, script, theatre and performance" (11). In this experiment, Schechner was applying the theories of inner and outer frame developed by sociologist Erving Goffman to shape and investigate audience behavior and response. With this example from Schechner, Bennett begins to evolve her concept of the "horizon of expectations" of audiences as the "pre-activated receptive processes" that, shaped by personal history and cultural influences, are brought to each performance experience (104). It is in works such as Schechner's, Bennett asserts, that audiences find themselves in processes of negotiation, previously unexplored.

For Bennett, semiology allows for analysis of the ways in which "multivalent components" of theater operate and interact with audiences as signifying systems (12). Through the research of Barthes, Eco, and other semioticians, Bennett defines live performance as complex events, which, unlike written texts, are time bounded and subject to "rapid switching between denotation and connotation" as audiences interpret the innumerable stage signs presented (70). To underscore the necessity of the spectator in the coding/decoding process, Bennett quotes theater semiotician Keir Elam: "'The spectator, by virtue of his [*sic*] very patronage of the performance…initiates the

communicative circuit'" (71); this circuit includes different levels of dialectic

engagement, among them audience-fictitious world, audience-performer, performer-

performer and audience-audience. Synthesizing the work of many scholars, Bennett

theorizes that the major contributions of semiology to audience studies has been an

exploration of the ways in which the "meaning-generating operations of on-stage signs

has illuminated the audience's relationship with the 'make-believe' world" (72).

Mixed-Reality Performance

British new media scholars Steve Benford and Gabriella Giannachi's case study

analyses of productions of mixed-reality performance in their *Performing Mixed Reality*

present examples of situations in which audiences assume roles in a triadic relationship of

spectating, authoring, and orchestration. The technologically mediated and multiply

interfaced performance work that pervades Benford and Giannachi's research presents

issues for discussion that are beyond the parameters of the present study. Thus, I focus on

their insight into the ways in which the choices of audience members are as deeply

influenced by their understanding of the exchange between roles as they are through their

own individual actions. Benford and Giannachi discuss this as the presence of a "fourth

fundamental aspect" of mixed-reality performance: the complex structures through which

people take action and are conscious of the consequences of their actions while

simultaneously learning and applying knowledge as they shift between roles (2011, 175).

In their analysis of the UK-based Blast Theory's interactive and site-sensitive 2007

work *Rider Spoke*, Benford and Giannachi describe a recursive process in which

participants, outfitted with bicycles and communication devices, traveled throughout

London, listening, reflecting, and commenting while being given instructions by Blast Theory's artistic directors. The devices allowed the participants to record their own thoughts, which could be anything from a personal memory to a fictional story about someone standing in the space, for other participants to listen to at a later time. For Benford and Giannachi, *Rider Spoke* conflates the roles of spectator, author, and orchestrator via the mediation of technology. A participant could orchestrate a situation to perform a story while simultaneously in the moment authoring it for a future listener. Benford and Giannachi apply Goffman's theory of inner and outer frames to describe the porosity of spectator and bystander roles as it occurs within *Rider Spoke* and other mixed-reality performances. Benford and Giannachi suggest that by presenting audiences with and challenging them through "intermedia and found spaces" (194), mixed-reality performances strive to "blur the performance frame by implicating and involving bystanders and making the fictional world seem more extensive than it is" (192) and in this way, audience members have the agency, through their actions, to change both the event and their experience within it. The issues Benford and Giannachi's raise with their discussion of mixed reality performance resonate with the issues with which I am concerned when researching immersive performance. In particular, their analyses of the fluctuating roles of audiences in relation to spectating, authoring, and orchestrating aligns with my inquiry into the function of audiences in the case studies featured in this dissertation.

Considering Coauthorship in Performance

Authorial control over the performative experience was questioned by major figures in visual arts, theater, and dance, including but not limited to Andy Warhol, Merce Cunningham, Yoko Ono, and Marina Abramović. These artists experimented with theories and practices that emerged during their time with the intention of engaging audiences in new ways. Challenges to authorial control emerged as artists explored practices of coauthorship and relinquished—to various extents—their control when including the participation of audiences. This relinquishing of control was, in some cases, essential to the actualization of many of the works. In the discipline of writing, authorial control was understood as the "destruction of every voice" (Barthes 1978, 141) and the experimentalists of the 1960s wrestled with such control, as this "paradox is precisely the driving force and pleasure principle behind much of participatory art" (Frieling 2008, 34). In other words, to prioritize the spectator in the works they created, these artists had to manage a partial erasure of their selves and create space for audiences in the design of their works.[14] The question posed by art and media historian Rudolf Frieling—"is it a prerequisite for art to produce authorial positions even when the artists have based their practice on collaborative or participatory effects?" (34)—highlights the paradoxical situation of those artists who wished to challenge notions of authorial control.

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[14] A point of interest related to the concept of *erasure of the artist* is that within many immersive productions, including two productions running in New York City at the time of this writing (*Sleep No More* and *Then She Fell*), the artists have deleted the convention of a curtain call or bow at the end of the performance; neither the performers nor the artistic directors present themselves to receive a face-to-face response from the audience. Josephine Machon mentions the possibility of no curtain call in her Table 1, "Traditional Theatre vs. Immersive Theatre" (2013, 55).

The works *Cut Piece* and *Rhythm O*, created and performed by performance artists Yoko Ono and Marina Abramović, respectively, are examples of instructional pieces where artists have granted degrees of authorial control to the audience. In her 1965 *Cut Piece*, Ono presented her body as an object to be manipulated, offering the audience a pair of scissors and instructions to snip away her clothing, which slowly revealed her flesh. Ten years later in 1975, Marina Abramović similarly pressed upon ideas of participation and interactivity with audiences in her work *Rhythm 0,* in which audience members were provided with instructions that suggested they could use seventy-two objects, including guns, razors, and knives, on Abramović's body as they desired.

While not the first, or the last, pieces to bring the genre of conceptual art face to face with the idea of authorial control, these works of Ono and Abramović specifically situated the idea of bodies in action, their own bodies and those of their audiences, in provocative new realms from which to consider the prerogatives of meaning making. However, a critical point to emphasize in the work of Ono and Abramović is that their physical presence was part of the works' attraction for audiences. In *Cut Piece* and *Rhythm O*, Ono and Abramović subjected *themselves* to the unknown, and as they did so, their bodies, while seemingly passive, signaled the presence of the author. Artists creating immersive performance, by contrast, position the audience members at the center of the production in such a way that they engage in and perceive experiences, and thus are the ones subjected to the unknown. That said, I consider the work of Ono and Abramović to be significant in establishing circumstances and parameters for audience participation in live performance settings.

The idea of that art could exist simply in the possibility of contingent circumstances, that anything could be "art if you think so" and actualized as such whether it was actually accomplished or not, extended the discourse put forth by Barthes into myriad realms (Frieling 2008, 43). In the realms of performance, particularly that which is collaborative, participatory, interactive, or immersive, and wherein the medium of the body in motion allows for more interpretability than spoken or written text, the creator/author must accept the paradox that ceding authorial control can accentuate accountability while engendering disappearance.

Artists such as Ono and Abramović, among others, who paved the way for further inclusion of the audience in live performance events, and philosophers such as Barthes, who questioned the role of the author as holder of authorial position over the text, are presenting the issues that open the space for the discussion of the changing roles of audiences. The works of artists, and theories of philosophers, as well as the terms, histories, and contemporary practices presented in this chapter serve as frameworks through which I address the issues that emerge from the case studies presented in the following data chapters. Questions about where a work resides play out differently through the perspectives of artistic directors, dancers, and audiences whose voices are featured in the case studies here. Theoretical notions emerge from each production that are specific to their individual contexts and content, yet all relate back to the fact that dance is deployed as the primary mode of expression. The issues that are brought forth through this inquiry are (1) how freedom and control are negotiated during performance, (2) the implications of prioritizing the bodies of audiences alongside the bodies of

dancers, and (3) how immersive performance is contributing new perspectives to the

concept of authorship.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to include the voices of artistic directors, dancers/performers, and most essentially, audience participants who are directly engaged with dance in immersive productions, as research into the impact and influence of dance is largely missing from the discourse surrounding immersive performance. By examining the responses of artistic directors, dancers, and audience members, I sought to better understand how immersive theater practices are affecting dance practices and, conversely, how dance affects immersive practices.

Research Design

Initially it was my intention that my dissertation would focus on a case study of one production, *Sleep No More* (*SNM*), with the goal of interviewing the artistic directors and as many dancers and audience participants as possible. However, through my online research of critical reviews, articles, and blogs related to *SNM* I found references to another immersive production, titled *Then She Fell* (*TSF*), by Third Rail Projects in New York City. I purchased tickets and attended a performance. While also advertised as immersive theater, *TSF* was created by artistic directors who prioritize dance and choreography. I contacted the artistic directors and asked if they would be willing to be interviewed along with their dancers. At this time, it became clear that having multiple productions through which to gather data would be beneficial, as it would allow me to

identify commonalities as well as differences in individual perceptions of dance and immersive performance across productions.

Robert Stake, author of *The Art of Case Study Research*, asserts that when pursuing a multicase study, it is important that "individual cases share a common characteristic or condition" and that the cases "may be members of a group or examples of a phenomenon" (2006, 5, 6). It was essential to my research that any production chosen as a case study would exist as a bounded system and incorporate dance as an essential structural and expressive component. Thus, when choosing multiple productions, I established that four specific criteria would determine their inclusion in the study. First, I selected productions that prioritize dance as the primary medium through which content is shared with audiences. Second, I included only productions explicitly identified as immersive so as to establish a common foundation. Third, I selected only productions currently in performance, to allow me to engage in participant observation—a key method of case study—during a prescribed time period for data gathering. Fourth, I chose productions with a minimum performance history of twenty-five presentations, to maximize data-gathering potential from the reflections of artistic directors, dancers, and audiences.

SNM and *TSF* both existed as bounded systems, and after I attended performances of each, it was evident to me that dance was an integral element that both shaped the delivery of the productions and affected audience perceptions. The advantage of choosing *SNM* and *TSF* as units of analysis is that they continued to be produced throughout the

time of my data collection and thus I was able to revisit the productions multiple times.[15]

Identifying a third production that had the common characteristics of dance and immersive practices took considerable time. While several immersive theater productions were being presented in New York at that time, it became clear to me, through online research and in some cases through attending productions in person, that dance was not a significant component of these productions. I searched for two months for an immersive production that would meet the criteria of being a bounded system and prioritizing dance as a significant mode of expression. Fortunately, a chance conversation with Stephen O'Connell, an alum of the Dance Department at Rutgers, revealed that in 2009 he had created an immersive work titled *Dance Marathon* (*DM*), which was still touring, in collaboration with the Toronto-based collective bluemouth inc., of which he is a founding member.

I soon discovered that opportunities to experience *DM* as a researcher were limited, because, unlike *SNM* and *TSF*, the work was performed only when it was booked for live performance festivals.[16] My opportunity to participate came in the summer of 2014 when *DM* was featured as part of Canada's Magnetic North Theatre Festival, hosted that year by the city of Halifax, Nova Scotia. O'Connell invited me to participate in *DM* during its Halifax run, as a volunteer embedded dancer rather than one of the audience members, all of whom participate as "contestants." Unfortunately, I was recovering from an injury at

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[15] Both *SNM* and *TSF* are still in production and continue to be presented in their Chelsea and Brooklyn venues at the time of this writing.

[16] Between 2009 and 2011, bluemouth inc. performed *DM* several times a year in North America and abroad. Since 2012, *DM* has been produced about once a year, primarily outside North America.

that time and could not participate as either an embedded dancer or a contestant. O'Connell instead arranged for me to attend the rehearsals as an observer, and ultimately I served as assistant stage manager during the performance. My inability to participate physically in the four evenings in which *DM* was presented in Halifax allowed me to be a participant-observer in a different way by witnessing the performances and participating via an "insider" role. In 2015 I was able to attend as an audience participant/contestant, when *DM* was presented as part of the Mayfest Bristol live performance festival in the United Kingdom. In this performance, I danced and at the same time observed the production from within my position as an immersed contestant.

After determining the three productions that would serve as case studies, I identified and conducted interviews with three groups of participants—artistic directors, dancers, and audience participants—from each of the three productions. To elucidate terms and their usage, the phrase *artistic directors* identifies persons who are responsible for the creation and production of immersive performance; *dancers* describes individuals assigned to specific performance roles and responsibilities within productions; and *audience participants* refers to individuals who have engaged in the event, either through invitation or paid admission, and for whom the event has been created and is intended. The terms *spectator* and *audience* are used to refer to components of the larger phenomena of audience culture and reception.

In order to shape my research of the three productions and the inquiry I would pose to the three groups of research participants, I developed the following research questions to guide my inquiry:

1. What creative processes and production strategies are deployed by Punchdrunk, Third Rail Projects, and bluemouth inc. that support dance and immersive experiences between audiences and dancers?

2. What are the experiences of dancers of immersive performance? In what ways do they understand and describe their experiences of the body, including their body and the bodies of others they have observed as part of their experiences?

3. What are the experiences of audience participants of immersive performance? In what ways do they understand and describe their experiences of the body, including their body and the bodies of others they have observed as part of their experiences?

4. What are the dynamics of audience participant experiences of *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM* and what are the implications of those experiences for dance spectatorship?

5. What are the factors affecting audience development for Punchdrunk, Third Rail Projects, and bluemouth inc., and how might twenty-first-century technological sensibilities and social media practices affect dance spectatorship?

<div align="center">Qualitative Methods for Data Collection</div>

I developed a qualitative research process to gather data from the multiple groups of research participants identified for this study. Qualitative research served as an appropriate method of inquiry because it afforded me opportunities to explore

phenomena (dance and immersive performance) through both interpretive and constructivist epistemological perspectives; encompass participants, including myself, in the processes of data collection; examine how dance and immersive practice are being deployed to construct immersive productions; and generate analyses and interpretations with the intention of understanding how individuals who experience dance and immersive performance make meaning from their impressions.

In conducting my research, I prioritized what Sharan Merriam, author of *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, has described as the basic tenets of qualitative research: (1) a focus on meaning and understanding through the participant's perspective; (2) an emphasis on the researcher as "the primary instrument for data collection and analysis," which includes consideration of the researcher's reflexivity and ethics; and (3) the understanding that research moves forward through inductive processes because of nonexistent or insufficient theoretical analysis of the phenomenon (2009, 15). When I began my research, I investigated extant literature for theoretical and philosophical concepts that I could incorporate as data and found minimal theoretical analysis of dance's relationship to immersive performance. I therefore concluded that I needed to design my study in a way that would enable me to gather as much data as possible from multiple sources and perspectives while keeping in mind the delimitations on my time and other resources.

As a researcher applying qualitative methods, I recognized the requirement to consider ontological and epistemological concerns, including the nature of reality, particularly how reality can be "known"; the reliability and believability of data; and the

ways in which data and evidence are represented. In considering the myriad qualitative research methodologies from which I could approach my research, case study emerged as an appropriate methodology because it allowed me to focus upon specific immersive productions as "bounded systems" (L. M. Smith quoted in Merriam 2009, 40) and investigate them as distinct "unit[s] of analysis," that is, cases (Miles and Huberman 1994, 545). Merriam describes *case study* as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam 2009, 40), while in *The Art of Case Study Research* Robert Stake calls the case "a specific, complex, functioning thing" (1995, 2). Considering both Merriam's and Stake's definitions, I recognized that the case study as a methodology would allow me to explore dance and immersive performance while focusing my data collection upon a prescribed set of individuals and circumstances, the three specific immersive productions described earlier.

Stake advocates the development of case studies via ethnographic and phenomenological methods, to present a "palette of methods" through which to approach phenomena (xii). Following Stake, I included the ethnographic tool of participant observation and interviews of research participants as methods for collecting data for each case study. Although my research was not conducted through phenomenological methods, aspects of phenomenology informed my research because my data prioritized— much like that of phenomenologists—the "lived experience" of individuals (John Van Manen quoted in Merriam 2006, 24). As sociologist Michael Quinn Patton explains, there is "the assumption that *there is an essence or essences to shared experience*" within phenomenological research and "the assumption of essence…becomes the defining

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characteristic of a purely phenomenological study" (2002, 106; italics in the original). My inquiry was not focused on creating a descriptive study of the essence of my research participants' experiences with dance and immersive performance. However, I approached the data gathered from my research participants as phenomenological—as representative of their lived experiences—and as such, their perceptions were essential to my analysis of the interrelatedness of dance and immersive performance in the productions selected for study.

The ethnographic tool of participant observation was essential in approaching each of the three immersive productions as individual sites of fieldwork. Anthropologist James Spradley emphasizes immersion and interactivity in his guidance for individuals engaging in participant observation (Spradley 1980, 145). Following Spradley, I made it my goal as a researcher to immerse myself as much as possible within these performances. I attended multiple performances of each, to have "direct experience with the phenomenon" and gather data (Merriam 2009, 25). While I focused upon observing the performance, particularly tracking the choreography as it unfolding throughout the space, I was aware that my experiences of the total theatrical environment—engaging with performers or audience members as well as interacting with the space and scenography—would be useful for data to reflect upon postperformance. Through participant observation, I gained multiple perspectives of the particular structures, relationships, dynamics, and values shaping how dance and immersive practices were interfacing in the productions I analyzed.

Interactions with dancers and other audience members during my participant observation experiences ranged from minimal to more extensive. For example, during one performance in which I was engaged in participant observation, a dancer appeared next to me and handed me an object and then disappeared, so my time to interact was minimal. By contrast, in another situation, a dancer led a fellow audience member and me to a room and left us alone with an unopened letter on a table. Having been told not to speak, the audience member and I engaged in a nonverbal, gestural debate of whether or not to open the envelope that lay, temptingly, in front of us. These types of experiences, as well as my perceptions of choreography and performance, featured prominently in the voice memos I recorded immediately after each performance, audio documents that then served as my field notes. My choice to use participant observation as a data collection method required that I remain aware of how my experiences could shape how I applied other methods in the research process, namely, when conducting interviews. For example, as an outcome of my participation in the productions, my experiences undoubtedly shaped my questioning, which in turn allowed me to guide the interviews toward inquiry that could yield data about particular performance situations. Alternatively, I felt it was possible that I could influence the interview process by introducing too many of my own interpretations, generated as they were through my own biases. Throughout my research, to establish the reliability of the study I worked to balance the implications of my choice to use participant observation.

Following Spradley, when I engaged in participant observation I found it necessary to constantly clarify for myself the differences between being an audience participant and

being a participant observer, or as Spradley puts it, an "ordinary participant and a participant observer" (1980, 54). When I attended the performances with the goal of being a participant observer, often I was inevitably drawn into the dance and theatrical content, and at times I felt more like an audience participant. At these moments, I struggled with the challenge to divide my attention and awareness between engaging in the activities and observing the details of the circumstances surrounding and supporting them.

Brian Moeran, a professor of social anthropology, asserts that fieldwork is more successful when researchers engage over time as participants rather than observers by establishing themselves as a consistent presence and entity within situated activities. By this, Moeran means that while a researcher may enter as a participant observer to absorb as much as possible from observing, at some point the researcher will begin to prioritize what he or she wishes to concentrate upon and will require different access to information. The shift to observant participant "enables the fieldworker to move from front stage to back stage in the study" (Moeran 2007, 2). Moeran references sociologist Erving Goffman here, who adapted the terms "front stage" and "back stage," from the terminology of theater in his seminal text, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959, 112). Goffman believes that individuals establish boundaries between what they perceive of their *front stage* selves, which is the impression they wish to present to the world, and their *back stage* selves, or the more vulnerable aspects of one's being. Building upon Goffman's research of impression management, Moeran states that by a researcher's reconceiving one's action as a participant rather than an observer, he or she

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can move from the "front stage to the back stage" to gather primary research material that reduces participants' need to "manage impressions and to put across an image that may in fact be rather different from their 'real' selves" (13).

Merriam, when discussing participant observation, also addresses the duality of the researcher's role, noting that participant observation is a "marginal position and difficult to sustain" while further describing it as a binary "activity in that the researcher usually participates but not to the extent of becoming totally absorbed in the activity" (2009, 126). Merriam classifies several types of observational stances in her text that I found helpful, among them *complete participant*, *participant as observer*, *observer as participant*, and *complete observer*. Embedded in these classifications are the ethical issues of employing covert or overt observational tactics while conducting this type of research, issues I worked to maintain awareness of to protect the privacy and safety of the participants. During my experiences of participant observation, I believe that I was often shifting between the four classifications provided by Merriam and that those shifts allowed me to be aware of different kinds of interactions and data of which to make note.

Through interviews of different groups of individuals—artistic directors, dancers, and audience participants—my purpose was, as Stake describes, "to preserve the *multiple realities*, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening," in each of the three productions I chose as part of my collective case study (Stake 1995, 12; italics in the original). When using interviews as data, I aligned myself with the principles described by Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin in *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. I followed their "responsible interviewing model," which views the

interview process as "dynamic and iterative, not just a set of tools" (2011, 15). To best

ensure continuity of the research process, I adhered to Rubin and Rubin's notion that

"iterative research design" is an adaptive process. In other words, I was aware that I

needed to pay attention to changes in circumstances that arose—for example, a research

participant would gesture in such a way as to prompt me to ask his or her to clarify the

gesture and its connection to what the participant was describing. I also became attuned

to what could be learned from the research participants as "conversational partners," such

as trying to gauge how much time I should allow for reflection during interview sessions

(16).

Following Rubin and Rubin, I conceptualized the interview and its analysis not as a

"one-time task, but an ongoing process," and practiced self-reflexivity and self-evaluation

as a researcher to organize my approaches as necessary and appropriate (16). Examples

of my self-reflexivity in an interview included being mindful when a research participant

asked questions of me in such a way that led the interview to become conversational,

with my revealing more about my perceptions of experiences than I intended. In those

situations, I self-evaluated in the moment in order to reorient the interview so to situate

the participant at the center of the exchange.

Rubin and Rubin's model emphasizes a consideration of the ability of the

interviewees to contribute expertise, experience, and diverse perspectives. While

preparing to interview my research participants, I recognized that I might confront issues

that exist within participant observation and other data collection methods in relation to

the ontology, epistemology, reliability, and believability of the data. In a paper emerging

from their online project *Watching Dance: Kinesthetic Empathy* (2014), dance and theater scholars Matthew Reason and Dee Reynolds articulate their struggles with issues of reliability and believability in their research, specifically the methodological problem of how much value or credit to attribute to the "participants' expression of their own experiences" (Reason and Reynolds 2010, 51). Reason and Reynolds resolve the issues of reliability and believability for themselves by accepting that "construction is contingent, fluid…and might change according to who they were talking to…but it is nonetheless a significant aspect of…experience" (51). With this stance, Reason and Reynolds underscore the reality that talking about performance experiences is a process of construction and meaning making in the moment.

One further feature of methodology used in my research is triangulation, described by sociologist Norman Denzin as "the use of multiple methods in the study of the same object" (2009, 301), which was at the forefront of my process as a strategy to strengthen the validity of the study. I deployed a protocol of triangulation through the use of multiple methods of data collection, employing participant observation, interviews, and documents found in print and online. In addition, I solicited feedback from the individuals I interviewed through member checking, another protocol of triangulation. Through my use of triangulation throughout the data collection process, I assembled a complex framework of diverse perspectives for each case study through which to question and analyze dance and immersive performance.

Additional Data Collection Methods

As the study progressed, I initiated additional data collection methods that assisted me in expanding my data set. First, in the case of *SNM*, I asked Tony Bordonaro to connect me to Maxine Doyle, choreographer and associate artistic director of Punchdrunk. I invited Doyle to present a lecture about *SNM* at the Dance Department of Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University in March 2012. Doyle arranged for Bordonaro; Conor Doyle, assistant choreographer and dancer; and Tori Sparks, dancer, to accompany her for the presentation. The audience for this lecture included bachelor of fine arts dance and theater majors and dance faculty, as well as bachelor and master of fine arts theater majors and theater faculty from the Theater Department at Mason Gross. I videotaped the panel with the permission of Maxine Doyle and had the text transcribed.

While this presentation occurred before I had submitted my Institutional Review Board applications, because this lecture was a public event I was able to use the data gathered to inform my future research. During the presentation I was able to present preliminary questions, such as "Why did you choose to attend this performance?" and "Can you tell me about your experience?" to the audience members, which helped later when I was refining my interview questions. I was also able to pose questions to Maxine Doyle, Conor Doyle, Sparks, and Bordonaro, which helped to establish concepts about which I could inquire further in future interviews.

In the case of *DM*, because it is performed less frequently than *SNM* and *TSF*, I struggled to find audience participants to recruit for interviews. After each of the *DM* performances I attended in Halifax, I waited outside with a pack of index cards, on which

were included my e-mail address and a short description of my research project. As audience participants exited, I approached them and asked them to contact me if they were interested in being interviewed. This strategy was not successful in recruiting research participants, yielding only one interview. I changed strategies when I attended the *DM* performance on May 19, 2015, as part of Mayfest Bristol. After participating for the whole evening as a registered contestant, I left the venue immediately after the winners were announced and waited outside in the courtyard, where I knew audience members would be exiting. As they arrived in the courtyard, I asked if they were willing to share their thoughts about participating in the production. I explained to each person whom I approached that his or her contributions were anonymous and that responses would be recorded via voice memo and incorporated into a word cloud in my dissertation. Each person was asked to give me a sound bite of 140 characters, or more, if the person wished.

In attempting this strategy, I anticipated it would not be possible to conduct a proper interview with consent forms and other permissions, because of my limited time with the individuals exiting the venue. After their three hours participating in *DM*, I assumed that audience members were interested in getting on with their evening, whether that meant continuing on to a pub or going home to rest. However, I found that many were excited about what they had just experienced and very willing to share their perceptions. No one refused my request and, in fact, several spoke at length, sharing their experiences in detail. This tactic proved successful in the ways I had hoped, which was to capture the immediate reflections of participants. I transcribed the recordings verbatim into a

document and put the document through an online word cloud generator, which produced

a representation of responses (fig. 1).

Lovely way into the world of dance marathons

Exhilarating

I learned some different dances

No "us and them" divide   lovely participatory experience

I loved every minute of it   Thought-provoking

Very beautiful   Learned the Madison

Absolutely amazing   Beautiful

Much more than I thought it would be   Exhilarating

Well-planned   Very entertained   Terrific night

snapshots of life   Fun and inclusive   silly

Thoroughly enjoyed   Energy

I am pooped right now   Eye-opening   Danced a lot

I loved it   Great evening

Powerful   Brilliant   so much dancing

Surprising   Incredible   Professionals and locals

Awe-inspiring   Really cool   The most exercise I have ever done

Really great fun   Interesting   Just brilliant   Triumphant

Sweaty   Energizing   Good time

Absolutely

Unexpected   Team-bonding

Fantastic musicians   Really enjoyed it

Met some really great people   Poignant moments

Dance for three hours   Quite surprised   Best thing we've done all year

If exercise was like that every day then I would do it

Not necessarily a sequence of narratives

Participatory theater done brilliantly

Amazing

Figure 1. Word cloud from *Dance Marathon* participants at Mayfest Bristol. Mayfest
Bristol, United Kingdom, May 2015.

This graphic representation of audience responses proved helpful in identifying themes of interest for further analysis in the *DM* data chapter.

Internet research was an additional collection tool that yielded rich data in the form of primary and secondary sources. The websites of Punchdrunk, Third Rail, and bluemouth inc. were important resources for my study, as was the significant amount of online content that exists for each production of *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM*. The Facebook pages for each company or production, as well as critical reviews, articles, and fan blogs and other social media sources provided critical and important information about the productions from artistic directors, dancers, and audience participants. I discovered several fan blogs and other social media sources that were created specifically in response to *SNM* and *TSF*. I researched these to determine if bloggers were responding to their experiences of dance and immersion and posting it online. However, because many of the creators of blogs devoted to *SNM* or *TSF* do not identify themselves by name, I was conscious of issues of believability and reliability. Many fans create fan fiction based on *SNM* and *TSF*, and the descriptions of experiences I found on these sites could be entirely fictionalized, which, while interesting from another perspective, was not the focus of my research. For the majority of the fan blogs I encountered, I focused on identifying evidence of enthusiasm for the productions, rather than relying on them for specific data.

Interview Preparation

In preparation for interviews with research participants, I trained in oral history interview techniques with dance scholar and historian Jeff Friedman. Following Mikhail

Bakhtin, Friedman (2012) suggests that interviews are dialogic processes, meaning that the interaction between researcher and research participant is such that questions and responses continually shape and inform the interview process. For example, when a research participant responds to an interview question, his or her answer *both* provides data that address that particular inquiry *and* informs the entire interview process moving forward. As the researcher and research participant share in the process of exchanging information, they are constructing the knowledge together in the interview through the interplay of their individual perspectives. The researcher synthesizes what he or she has just heard from the participant and considers it in the context of other extant information the researcher is familiar in order to proceed and then alters the inquiry as necessary to best advance the process of data collection. Alternatively, the research participant is gauging his or her responses based on the nature of the inquiries, how the queries are presented, and the responses the participant has offered. Friedman's training enabled me to better understand that my role as a researcher during interviews is to create a dynamic and interdependent environment that prompts research participants to generate data from the sharing of their experiences.

I used Friedman's open-ended model of questioning, which he categorizes in two ways, in developing my interview questions. In the first category are questions intended to elicit detailed reflection; the second contains questions intended to elicit dynamic process. Questions that elicit detailed reflection often begin with openings such as "Tell me about ___" and "What was ___ like?" whereas questions to elicit thoughts about dynamic processes are focused on *why* (to explore motivations and values) and *how* (to

explore methods and agency). Friedman stresses that these openings are not mutually exclusive, and the researcher can shift between them as necessary. Because my research design features the voices of artistic directors, dancers, and audience participants, I acknowledged the need to develop interview questions—including those to elicit detailed reflection and those to elicit dynamic processes—specifically for each group. While some of the questions, particularly for the artistic directors and dancers, were similar, it was important to craft questions that acknowledged the different ways in which each group might conceive of, perceive, or relate to dance and immersive performance.

My initial interview questions were intended to gather background information about artistic directors, dancers, or audience participants, with the notion that their responses would help to contextualize their relationship to dance and immersive performance. In the case of artistic directors, questions focused on gaining a broader understanding of how and why they came to make immersive work that includes dance. The initial questions I created for dancers were aimed at learning about the types of professional experiences they had had prior to joining an immersive production. For audience members, I was curious about what had prompted them to attend immersive performance. I sent each research participant my research questions and interview questions in advance when I recruited them, so they were aware of the nature of the interview. Thus, I was able to develop sets of initial questions for each group, to elicit reflection on participants' interests and past experiences, as follows:

Describe your background as an artistic director.

o How did you begin making your own work?

o How has your work changed over time?

o What pathways led you to work with immersive practices?

Describe your background as a dancer.

o When and how did you begin performing professionally?

o When did you begin working with companies that create immersive performance?

o What pathways led you to work with companies integrating immersive practices?

Describe your interests as an audience member.

o Do you attend live performances regularly? If so, what types?

o What was the first immersive production that you ever attended?

o What prompted you to attend that performance?

Following the initial series of questions, I introduced questions intended to elicit reflection or thoughts about dynamic processes. Examples of these questions include the following:

Artistic directors

o How would you describe the relationship between dance and immersive performance?

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o Describe what you have learned or discovered from the integration of dance and immersive practices.

o Tell me how you would define a successful immersive production, either your own or another that you have experienced.

Dancers

o How would you describe the relationship between dance and immersive performance?

o Describe what have you learned or discovered about yourself as a dancer through working in this immersive production.

o Tell me about an encounter with an audience participant in an immersive performance. What guided your choices when interacting?

Audience participants

o In what ways were you aware of dance in the immersive performance?

o How did you understand your body and senses (touch, taste, smell, hearing, and vision) in the immersive performance? How do you understand your movement through the space and time of the performance?

o Describe an encounter with a dancer as an audience participant in the immersive performance. What did you experience and come to understand about that encounter?

After preparing for the interviews, I transitioned my focus to the recruitment of research participants, including the development of a description of research to share with them, as well as recruitment scripts and consent forms.

<center>Research Participant Recruitment</center>

After settling on *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM* as my three case studies, I submitted proposals to the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) at Texas Woman's University and Rutgers University (where I am on the faculty) for approval of my study. In drafting my proposals for both institutions, I emphasized the procedures through which I would recruit participants, including the development of three recruitment narratives and three consent forms, one each for artistic directors, dancers, and audience participants. I indicated that I planned to recruit six to eight artistic directors, ten to twelve professional dancers, and fifteen to twenty audience participants. When concluding the interview stage of my research, I determined that I had met the goals outlined in my prospectus and my IRB proposal by interviewing eleven artistic directors, sixteen dancers, and twenty audience participants.

Artistic directors were selected on the basis of their roles as the creators of *SNM*, *TSF*, or *DM*. Dancers were selected if they had professional involvement with the *SNM*, *TSF*, or *DM* productions. Audience participants were selected had they attended performances of one of these three productions. My IRB proposal included an outline of my plan to conduct interviews and I presented an overview of how the interview data would be used. In addition, ethical concerns, such as protecting research participant identity and safekeeping of data, were addressed in the proposal.

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Ultimately, I recruited ten artistic directors, including Felix Barrett, founder and artistic director, and Maxine Doyle, choreographer and associate artistic director of *SNM*; Zach Morris, Tom Pearson, and Jennine Willett, co–artistic directors and choreographers of *TSF*; and Ciara Adams, Stephen O'Connell, Sabrina Reeves, Lucy Simic, and Richard Windeyer, the core members of the bluemouth inc. collective and artistic directors of *DM*. I also interviewed Daniel Pettrow, an associate artist at bluemouth inc., who contributed to the collective creation of *DM* and performs in the production; because of his roles in DM, I identify Pettrow in the total number of artistic directors interviewed. It is important to note that the artistic directors of *TSF* and *DM* have performed or continue to perform in their productions and their interviews included data that revealed their perspectives as both artistic directors and performers. For these individuals, I included their interviews in the total of artistic directors.

In my recruiting dancers employed by the *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM* productions, my interest was in speaking with dancers who had been involved in the development and creation of the productions and who had performed the work for at least six months. For this reason, I asked the artistic directors to recommend individuals to be interviewed, as the former could identify those who met my criteria. I acknowledge the possibility of bias when involving artistic directors in the recruitment of dancers; I understood when asking the artistic directors to recommend company members that they might suggest dancers with whom they have the best relationships and who they felt best represented the production. Given my research interests, I accepted the possibility that only a certain segment of the total dancer population might be recommended. I interviewed five dancers

working with *SNM* and three dancers (not including Morris, Pearson, and Willett) working with *TSF*. I interviewed eight performers who served as embedded dancers for *DM*—volunteers from the local communities where the production was performed. The embedded dancers are unique to *DM*; they are not bluemouth inc. core company members or hired dancers, yet they perform specific functions during the performances. With that in mind, I have included the embedded dancers in the total count of dancers.

I recruited audience members through several strategies: (1) I asked artistic directors to recommend audience participants whom they knew had attended multiple performances of their productions; (2) I asked friends, associates, and colleagues if they had attended any of the productions and would be willing to be interviewed; and (3) from searching online blogs and social media platforms I identified individuals who expressed that they had attended and e-mailed them to request interviews. In most cases, I gathered and analyzed data from blogs as public sources of information.

I recruited three bloggers as research participants under the category of "audience participants." When I identified someone online whom I wished to interview, I messaged that person through whatever contact function was available on his or her blog; this was usually an internal e-mail system of whatever social media platform the person was using. For those whom I contacted and who did not reply to my first message, I sent one follow-up message; I did not pursue anyone who did not respond to the second message. When a blogger made contact, I followed the same protocols as employed for other audience research participants, using recruitment scripts, consent forms, and access to written transcripts to redact information. These multiple approaches to recruitment

ensured more diversity of research participants beyond those who might be recommended by the artistic directors. I interviewed eight audience participants of *SNM*, seven audience participants of *TSF*, and five audience participants of *DM* (not including the embedded dancers for *DM*, who are included in performer totals).

All research participants were contacted via e-mail. The following documents were attached for their review: the description of research for participants, recruitment scripts (there were different scripts for artistic directors, dancers, and audience participants), and consent forms (different forms were composed for artistic directors, dancers, and audience participants). I corresponded by e-mail with all research participants to arrange the date, time, and location of all interviews. Several research participants sent their consent forms back by e-mail in advance of our meeting, while others completed them on site just before the interview began. I audiotaped all interviews on the iTalk application on my iPhone. Interviews were conducted at a time and place chosen by the research participant.

I intended to conduct my case study fieldwork in steps, beginning with *SNM* as my first unit of analysis and then progressing to *TSF* and *DM*. Educational researchers Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen recommend this strategy; as they note, "Doing more than one site at a time can get confusing. There are too many names to remember, too much diverse data to manage" (2007, 70). My research plan, however, did not proceed as I had hoped. The biggest factor affecting my ability to finish one case study before moving on to the next was the availability of research participants for interviews. In particular, the availability of artistic directors and dancers varied widely, which required me to

interview some participants about *TSF* and *DM* before I interviewed others about *SNM*.

Also, as mentioned previously, I often found references to *SNM* and *TSF* in the same

secondary sources I was researching online, which necessitated that I carefully

compartmentalize my analysis of each production to avoid any conflation of data. Despite

my intention to complete research on *SNM, TSF,* and *DM* in discrete stages, the process

was a circuitous one, as data from one production sometimes led me back to another in

order to augment, amend, clarify, or reassess my analyses.

<div align="center">Interview Process</div>

For *SNM* research participants, the majority of interviews took place at cafés or

restaurants in New York City, while a few were conducted via Skype or telephone. Third

Rail's artistic directors invited me to the *TSF* venue on Maujer Street in Brooklyn to

interview them and the dancers. I interviewed the audience participants recommended by

Third Rail by telephone, over Skype, or in person. Several bluemouth inc. members—

Adams, Reeves, Pettrow, and Simic—were interviewed during the Magnetic North

Festival. After the festival, I interviewed O'Connell in person in Brooklyn and Windeyer

via Skype. I conducted interviews with the embedded dancers and audience participants

of *DM* via Skype or telephone.

When I began each interview, I would review the nature of the study and explain

issues of protocol, including the fact that the research participant would receive a copy of

the transcript to review. Once protocols were discussed, I commenced with my initial

series of questions, as explained above. These questions prompted responses of

approximately twenty to thirty minutes in duration on average. While participants were

speaking, I paid close attention to each individual's inherent narrative style. Friedman (2012) suggests that by identifying a research participant's inherent narrative style as chronological, phenomenological, or associative, researchers are better able to adapt questioning as appropriate to each individual over the course of the interview.

At this point in the interview, I would suggest to the research participant that we take a short break of ten to fifteen minutes. While the participant had an opportunity to rest, use the restroom, get a drink, and so on, I reflected upon his or her narrative style, to adjust my questions as necessary. Before concluding each interview, I asked the research participant if he or she wished to reflect on anything that had not come up through the questioning. This query prompted some participants to reveal information that had not been discussed but that they felt was important to express. Others took the opportunity to ask questions about the research. Most were content to finish the interview with what they had already contributed. Each interview lasted approximately two hours. For several audience participants, I found it necessary to conduct a follow-up interview of approximately one hour. The approximate total interview time for each individual was estimated at two to three a half hours.

Data Analysis

To engage in participant observation, I attended six performances of *SNM*, four of *TSF*, and four of *DM*. After each performance, I recorded voice memos as my field notes, downloaded them to my laptop, and sent them to a transcription service. When the transcripts were returned to me, I engaged in concentrated rereading to analyze my experiences of particular moments from specific productions. Then, to generate a

keyword list, I used Johnny Saldaña's Affective Method, which is a first-cycle coding strategy to track recurring participant experiences, including words as well as "emotions, values and other subjective qualities of human experience" (Saldaña 2009, 52). Working from the voice memo transcripts and the keyword list, I adapted the material describing my participation into long-form prose-style writings that I call *scenarios* and that are included in the data chapters focusing on *SNM* and *TSF*. These scenarios present my experiences through interpretive and descriptive analyses for the reader while also offering a contextualized explanation of events that occur during performances.

Writing the scenarios achieved three purposes of my methodology. First, through the process of drafting the scenarios, I was able to translate into written language for the reader what I experienced during performances, namely, the highly sensory theatrical and scenographic content and the nonverbal encounters with dancers and other audience members. I crafted the scenarios with the intention of offering thick description of my participation, following Stake's suggestion that "readers can learn vicariously from an encounter with the case through the researcher's narrative description" (Stake quoted in Merriam 2009, 51). Second, in writing the scenarios, I was simultaneously engaged in the analytical processing of the events, constructing a foundation for future theorizing about them. Third, through the inclusion of scenarios in the *SNM* and *TSF* data chapters, I connected specific content from each production to theoretical concepts, which serve as tools to assist the reader in following my analysis. The scenarios provided me with opportunities to be self-reflexive about my experiences; at the same time, I was aware of Stake's suggestion that "reflective moments can detract from the intent of the researcher"

(Stake 1995, 128). Therefore, when organizing the data chapters, I worked diligently to balance my perspectives with that of the research participants.

When I eventually had the opportunity to be an embedded contestant in *DM* at Mayfest Bristol in 2015, drafting a scenario based on my experience did not feel appropriate. I had already attended rehearsals, served as assistant stage manager, and been a participant observer of four performances in Halifax. I felt I had too much a posteriori knowledge of the production and it seemed to me that any scenario I wrote would be informed by this knowledge. While it felt more true to gather information from the other audience members with whom I had just shared this experience—as I explained previously in the generation of the word cloud—I do describe what I experienced as a contestant, albeit not in the form of a scenario.

However, when writing the *DM* data chapter, the absence of a scenario or "impressionist tale" seemed significant. I decided to research online to see if anyone had posted on a blog or website a response based on his or her experiences of *DM* that felt reflective in ways similar to those of my scenarios. Fortunately, following the performances of *DM* at Mayfest Bristol, bluemouth inc. founding member Lucy Simic uploaded a link to a reflection/review written by Bella Fortune, writer in residence at Theatre Bristol (Simic 2015). I was excited to read Fortune's post; it was wonderfully written and evocative of the experience in ways that mirrored the enthusiasm expressed in the sound bites I had collected from other participants. I obtained Fortune's e-mail from one of the embedded dancers in Bristol and contacted her in February 2016 to request permission to use her work in my dissertation. I provided Fortune with the

introduction of my chapter so she could view how I had incorporated her work. She gave me permission to use her work to open the chapter and wrote back with the following statement: "I am very pleased that you have used my piece of writing in a way that, I feel, illustrates the quality of alliance that *Dance Marathon* was able to invoke. It is lovely to be reminded of those few hours and what an odd, whirlwind performance it was" (e-mail correspondence with the author, March 11, 2016).

I felt that Fortune's use of the term *alliance* in her e-mail aligned with statements reflected in the word cloud—as in "team-bonding" and "no 'us and them' divide"—as well as themes that were emerging from the data such as the ways in which audience participants cooperated with one another to jointly construct and perform their experiences within each performance. With this in mind, I was extremely pleased that Fortune had granted me permission to use her work, as I believe it is exemplary in filling a gap that I felt resulted from the lack of my own reflective writing for the *DM* chapter.

<center>Interviews</center>

As noted earlier, after each interview with a research participant, I downloaded the recording to my laptop and sent it to a transcription service, requesting that it be transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were typically returned to me by the transcription service within two weeks. When I received them, I forwarded them as attachments by e-mail to the research participants for review. In the body of e-mails, I encouraged participants to read the transcript carefully and redact any data that they did not wish me to use in the study. I requested that they complete their review within one month and included a date in the e-mail by which I asked them to send their revisions. I explained

that if I had not heard from them by the date indicated in the e-mail, I would assume their approval of the transcript and would use the data as presented. I estimated that the review process would take each participant approximately one and a half hours to complete. Thus, the total time commitment for each of the participants was estimated at 3.5 to 4.5 hours.

The reviewed transcripts that were returned to me reflected different types of editing. Some research participants heavily edited their transcripts, writing new paragraphs and contextualizing statements. For the most part, these heavily edited transcripts were more detailed and thoughts were articulated with more specificity than in the original. Other participants gave their transcripts only a light edit, clarifying sentences and correcting facts of data such as names or dates. A few research participants sent an e-mail back stating that they were too busy to review the documents and granting me permission to use the transcript as it was. Finally, there were individuals who did not respond or return the transcripts by the date requested. One participant chose not to edit the transcript, requesting instead to review a completed draft of the chapter to see how this participant's interview data would be used in context.

I used the edited versions of transcripts for my data analysis. As I worked progressively through each case study, I coded the transcripts related to that case first by using Saldaña's Affective Method for first-cycle coding, as described earlier, to track recurring words and themes for a keyword list specific to that production. Then, for each production I conducted comparative analyses of the keyword lists generated from my voice memos and those developed from interview transcripts. Several of the audience

participants I interviewed had attended performances of both *SNM* and *TSF*, and one research participant had attended *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM*. When reviewing the transcripts of participants who had attended multiple performances, I analyzed the interview data they provided for one performance separately from their experiences in the other. After finishing comparative analyses of the keyword lists from voice memo and transcripts for a case study, I turned my attention to secondary resources available for that case study. I read and coded data from articles, previews, critical reviews, blogs, and company websites to generate a third keyword list.

The amount of primary and secondary source data was overwhelming at this point of my research of each case study, although I was deeply acquainted with the materials after having thoroughly read and coded all the data and generated keyword lists. I found I needed to create a visual representation of the data before I could move forward with analysis. I applied a modified version of sociologist Adele Clarke's system of situational analysis, which she describes as making "abstract situational maps" (2005, 87). Clarke asserts that "a situational map should include all the analytically pertinent human and nonhuman, material and symbolic/discursive elements of a particular situation *as framed by those in it and by the analyst*" (87; italics in the original). Often referring to them as "messy maps" (95) because she encourages researchers to do "quick and dirty relational analyses" (102), Clarke suggests that situational maps are a means for "getting the researcher moving into and then around in the data" (84). Using large sheets of butcher paper, I organized information from my keyword lists graphically on my "messy maps," making notes of their origins from the voice memos, interviews, or secondary sources.

This allowed me to quickly isolate the sources to pull out quotes and references for citations. Themes began to emerge through the process of graphically laying out keywords, images, and other data. During my map making, I was engaged in second-cycle coding, what Saldaña might call "focused coding," through which, in addition to establishing salient concepts as themes, I was able to determine if new themes were developing through comparative analyses of the data from across the three lists of keywords.

While making my maps, I was simultaneously writing memos, which Clarke describes as the "most invaluable product of all the analytic work" (108). Indeed, these memos proved incredibly useful when I began prewriting the chapters, as they allowed me to both remember connections and make new ones in the process of writing. Sometimes in viewing the maps and rereading my memos, I was prompted to go back into interview data to recontextualize and reorganize my thinking, which enabled me to clarify arguments and ideas. Situational mapping for each case study proved to be an essential tool and allowed me to move into theoretical coding, through which I began to distill even further my analyses and finally shift into postcoding. During postcoding, I followed Saldaña's suggestion to find the "trinity"—that is, to identify the three major themes most prominent in the study, as well as begin "code-weaving" to explore how concepts were interrelated and could suggest causality (Saldaña 2012, 187). Finally, during my prewriting phase, Saldaña's suggestion to generate headings and subheadings (189) helped me to set up an infrastructure for my first, very rough drafts, which—while

needing extensive revision—served as a starting point for engaging in conceptual

discussions with my adviser to clarify my arguments.

Emerging Themes for Analysis and Their Representation in the Following Chapters

Subsequent to the processes of data collections and analyses, which included voice

memo and interviewee transcripts as well as theoretical concepts from extant literature, I

began the process of interpreting the data. Following educational anthropologist Fred

Erickson, who defines *interpretation* as "the most distinctive characteristic of qualitative

inquiry" (cited in Stake 1995, 8), I identified patterns, which led to the development of

themes. Some themes that emerged reflected emic issues, by which I mean the issues of

concern or importance for the research participants. Other themes reflected my concerns

as a researcher, such as how audience agency was conceptualized by artistic directors and

perceived by audiences.

Ten to twelve different themes emerged from the coding of each chapter; from

among them, I had to make decisions about which served my research and would provide

a coherent navigational path through the chapters for this study. I realized it would be

best to save some themes for future writing projects, while others were put aside

completely because they did not serve my intention of focusing on how dance and

immersive performance affect one another. Even with the very specific themes I chose

for each chapter, I acknowledge that each could be further investigated, providing more

information than is possible in this study. I chose the themes that appear in my study

when they became recognizable as recurring patterns through data coding and analysis

and became central in each case study.

It is important to note that at times various themes emerged in the case studies that were contradictory, because I had three different groups of interviewees and those interviewees had different roles in relation to the productions, which yielded, of course, different perspectives. When faced with contradictory themes, I focused on the tension between them, acknowledging that the themes were valid in relation to the groups of people from which they emerged and could have implications for my analysis. As a researcher looking at the phenomenon of dance-based immersive performance as broadly as possible, it was valuable to draw out the tensions, as they highlighted both the potential and contradictions of this form of live performance. After the identification of themes, my work as a researcher moved to the next level of analysis when I began the writing process of my data chapters. During this analysis, my focus on description and interpretation guided me in my theorizing of the data chapters, which are intended to provide the reader with multiple perspectives of the three immersive productions serving as my multicase study.

CHAPTER IV

THE TANDEM DANCE: STUDYING THE MOVEMENT OF SPECTATORS

AND PERFORMERS IN PUNCHDRUNK'S *SLEEP NO MORE*

A Paper Published in

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Julia M. Ritter

I am alone in a room, examining someone's personal belongings. I open a small

box that holds contents I can't distinguish in the darkness of the room. As I reach inside

to explore the objects, I feel someone move alongside me. My posture straightens as I am

startled, and my hand freezes, suspended within the box. A man comes into my view,

sliding the box out of my grasp while taking my wrist with his other hand. He

accomplishes these movements swiftly and gently before my mind registers what is

happening. I am not shocked by his actions; rather, when he establishes eye contact with

me, I perceive a grateful expression on his face, and I conclude that I've located

something for which he has been desperately looking. His sustained eye contact and light

touch on my wrist compel me to dash around the room with him and we weave paths

around furniture as he seems to search for something else that eludes him. Finally,

exhausting his search, he releases me, nods in my direction, and leaves the room. I am

not alone, however. I turn to realize that there were witnesses to my interactions with this

man. What just happened to me? What did the witnesses perceive?[17]

This scenario describes one of my experiences during a performance of the UK-based Punchdrunk company's immersive production of *Sleep No More* (*SNM*). *SNM* presents the drama of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* through dance, integrating elements and characters inspired by films by Alfred Hitchcock, namely, *Vertigo* and *Rebecca*.[18] The man with whom I interacted was the dancer performing the role of King Duncan and the witnesses were my fellow spectators. As a dance scholar, I seek out productions in which the moving bodies of dancers *and* audiences are prioritized, privileged, and contextualized through strategies of dance designed to offer audiences opportunities to experience dance differently during live performance events.[19] The majority of extant

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[17] The original version of this chapter was published in French. The figures did not appear in the French version but have been added here. The chapter was edited to ensure consistency of style with the rest of the dissertation, but content was not changed. Previously published as Julia M. Ritter, "Danse en tandem: Étude du mouvement des spectateurs et des performeurs dans *Sleep No More* de Punchdrunk," in "Engagement du spectateur et théâtre contemporain," edited by Hervé Guay and Catherine Bouko, special issue, *La Revue Tangence*: *Revue d'Études Littéraires* 108 (2015): 51–76. www.revuetangence.com.

[18] My positionality as a professional dancer and choreographer allows me different access during a performance such as *SNM*, in which the narrative content of *Macbeth* is performed through dance. For example, I am able to distinguish between compositional structures and choreographic devices, as defined by dance scholars/practitioners Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin (1982) in their text *The Intimate Act of Choreography* and discuss how these methods, among others, are deployed within *SNM* to impact the choices of spectators. I realize the background that I bring to the performance is perhaps different from that of other spectators.

[19] Art historian Claire Bishop describes "people as privileged materials" within the live performance process in reference to writer/filmmaker Guy DeBord's construction of situations in which "the audience function disappear[s] altogether in the new category of *viveur* (one who lives)." It is this idea of the spectator as "one who lives" alongside the

literature analyzing *SNM* as an example of immersive performance or immersive theater has been written by theater critics and dramatic theorists who describe these paid professionals as "actors."[20] However, the paid professionals performing in *SNM* are trained, professional dancers.[21] The lack of discourse related to dance in *SNM*—and in immersive performance in general—prompts me to explore the genre with the intention of broadening perspectives and expanding a discussion on the role of dance in immersive performance as an emergent mode of participatory arts practice. Between 2012 and the present, I have interviewed the choreographer as well as multiple dancers and spectators, and chronicled my own experiences as a participant observer over six performances. My analyses of these resources form the foundation for my conceptualization of *SNM* as a *tandem dance*, wherein dance is used as the primary medium for structuring the content delivered by the paid, professional dancers *and* as an improvisational method to encourage movement experiences for spectators (see figs. 2–5).

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cast members in the worlds created by immersive performance that I wish to study, particularly how spectators understand and advance the agency of their *mobility* and their *movement potential* to live in such worlds (Bishop 2006, 13).

[20] *Immersive theater* seems to have permeated the lexicon of performance criticism in the past five years, including in the writings of Josephine Machon and W. B. Worthen. However, the performance practices that include the audience have a long history (White 2012).

[21] The *SNM* performers I have interviewed and featured in this chapter self-identify as dancers and cite modern/contemporary dance as their primary movement training. Many have extensive experience with contemporary dance, contact improvisation, and ballet training, while others have training in gymnastics and other dance styles. In interviews with choreographer Maxine Doyle, she identifies them alternatively as "dancers" and "performers." Doyle commented that in productions other than *Sleep No More* Punchdrunk does employ "actors…that are particularly physically adept or sensitive" (2013, 7).

Conceptualizing the Tandem Dance: The Collaboration of Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle

Since its New York City premiere in February 2011, *SNM* has presented over seventeen hundred performances while ticket reservations are being accepted through September 2015. Punchdrunk's founder/artistic director Felix Barrett pioneered Punchdrunk's form of immersive theater in 2000.[22] Maxine Doyle, associate director and choreographer of Punchdrunk, had just put her own dance company (in which she was exploring the ways in which "dancing had an effect on [audiences]" through "intimacy of the setting" [Doyle, 2013, 2]) on hold when she met Barrett in 2002. Doyle explains how she and Barrett came together to create their first project, which was the first version of *SNM* in London in 2003, thus forging the aesthetic and partnership that guides Punchdrunk:[23]

> My company manager, Colin Marsh, ran an independent dance organization and there was some money and they invited people to make applications for a project to do on-site. Felix sent a strange application—it was a suitcase, with a box inside it, with a note that led Colin somewhere. Felix was seeking a choreographer…because he was feeling that words weren't working within his vision. But he didn't have the skill set to know what to do with movement. Colin introduced me to Felix and we just…hit it off. [Felix] had no real interest or desire in directing [the first project]. We did direct it together, but his focus was very much on the space and the music and the sound installation. It was the first time

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[22] In a public presentation, Maxine Doyle spoke about Punchdrunk's work, framing Felix Barrett's interests when forming the company: "His main drive was about challenging the nature of the theatergoing experience and challenging the nature of the audience experience…the aim to make the audience the epicenter of the experience. Felix started talking classic texts, *The Tempest*, *Woyzeck*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and deconstructing them…investigating the back stories of the characters and spreading these stories across huge transformed sites" (Doyle et al. 2012, 3).

[23] The second version of *Sleep No More* was produced in association with American Repertory Theatre in Boston in 2009.

he'd worked with dancers. So he let me do what I wanted to do, which was really just my work that I'd been doing [previously]…I immediately felt the satisfaction [from] the excitement of the audience from being that close to dancing, particularly from…audiences that weren't used to that, or expecting that. I felt like we were on to something—the combination of choreography and dance and visceral theater in relation to architecture and space with this sort of fluid audience relationship felt like [a] really interesting formula. (Doyle 2013, 3)

Of Punchdrunk's work to date, *SNM* has achieved the most critical and commercial success, attracting a critical mass of attention from critics, scholars, and the public. The New York production received two prestigious New York theater awards in 2011: the Drama Desk Award for Unique Theatrical Experience and the Obie Award's Special Citation for Design and Choreography.[24] I believe *SNM*'s popularity and longevity as a production in New York City is due in large part to how dance is conceptualized and centralized by both artistic directors as a methodology intended to facilitate spectator experience. The concept of the "tandem dance" also applies to the collaborative practices of Barrett and Doyle. By fracturing and adapting a dramatic text to make space for dance, Doyle's choreographic strategies and Barrett's tactics for locating "the audience at the epicenter of experience" come together as practices intended to immerse audiences in *SNM* (Doyle 2013, 3). The tandem dance of the directors allows for two structures—the predetermined choreography of the dancers and the instructional, improvisational movement score of the spectators—to partner and "occur in conjunction with one

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[24] The second version of *SNM* at A.R.T. in Boston won the Elliot Norton Award for Outstanding Theatrical Experience in 2010 (http://www.elliotnortonawards.com/#!2010/c43j).

another" in order to shape the production.[25] The adjective *tandem* suggests motion by

working together and/or acting in conjunction with another so it is a fitting metaphor for

the immersive work Doyle creates with Barrett. Doyle's wish to "make work that made

audiences excited enough to not want to go home and go to sleep" (2) is manifest and

substantiated via comments from spectators I interviewed. Gina Marie Hayes, a graduate

student of theater studying directing who has seen *SNM* over thirty times, recounted that

> I came out of Sleep No More [and] met up with my sisters in the bar…you know,
> [we] did the debrief thing…the excited debrief [discussing what happened to us].
> And I ended up back in Brooklyn where I was staying and couldn't sleep. Which
> is ironic considering the title of the show.…I ended up just going out. I felt like I
> needed to be outside. So I ended up going out at one in the morning and
> wandering around Brooklyn…just like being out in the night air and sort of
> experiencing.…It was amazing. I felt like I immediately had to go back. (Hayes
> 2014, 2)

Tim Heck, who attended *SNM* first as a spectator in 2013 and later joined the cast,

describes his initial experience:

> At the end I was upset because I was not ready to be done. I had to go up to the
> roof just to do a lap because I was not ready to be back in the world again. (Heck
> 2014, 28)

Paul Zivkovich, who joined *SNM* as Macbeth in 2011 and continues to perform the role,

acknowledges Doyle and Barrett's intentions and skills in creating deeply immersive

worlds that attract and invite repeat attendance:[26]

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[25] Definition of *tandem*, per the *Merriam Webster Dictionary* online
(http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tandem).
[26] Zivkovich took an eighteen-month leave from *SNM* to work with Doyle and Barrett to
develop the role of William in Punchdrunk's London production of *The Drowned Man*.
He returned to *Sleep No More* in 2014.

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[They] create these worlds where when you begin to scratch the surface there's just more and more layers and layers to discover. So, yeah, the temptation and desire to come again, to come a hundred times and more is there…to dig further…and I believe [they have] created worlds that you could forever keep doing that. (Zivkovich 2014, 39)

With *SNM*, dance became a primary method for creating the worlds of Punchdrunk's production. With the belief in the ability of dance to offer "visual storytelling," Doyle explains why she and Felix cast dancers:

I'm always interested in dancers that can make the movement meaningful.…Dancers can act.…They don't have to deliver a monologue, but they have to be able to tell stories, they have to be able to portray or project an emotion.…They often get described as actors.…It's always about the "actors" in *Sleep No More*, not the dancers. (Doyle 2013, 11)

Zivkovich corroborates Doyle's statement by describing the many times he has overheard exclamations from spectators such as "'Did you see the way they climbed those bookcase?' 'Did you see those actors move?' 'I've never seen actors who can dance like that, who can move like that.…' We get this a lot" (Zivkovich 2014, 22). Zivkovich and his fellow dancers serve as the primary conduits through which theatrical content is shared. They are exceptionally skilled at presenting abstract concepts and dramatic content through the body as both choreography and text. In addition, they bring specialized bodily knowledge and experience to interact with performance spaces and their contents, which, in the case of *SNM*, includes spectators. In the remainder of the paper, I will explicate the ways in which dance has been embedded within the production and in so doing, propose how dance—more so than dramaturgical linearity—contributes to *SNM*'s efficacy as a production.

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In presenting the possibility that two groups of dancers exist in *SNM*—the paid, professional dancers and the spectators—I must define and differentiate my terms for the reader. Unfortunately, there is a lexiconical gap (and often, a conceptual gap) at play as no term exists to describe "dancers-who-are-also-adept-actors." Identifying the paid professionals by either of the terms *dancer* or *performer* complicates my attempts at clarification. *Dancer* or *performer* could be used bilaterally across my analysis of the evidence of dance presented by both the "paid" (as in the paid, professional dancers) and "paying" (as in audience) participants in *SNM*. To avoid confusion, I will refer to the spectators as *spectators* and the paid, professional dancers as *cast members*. As the paid professionals of *SNM* do not self-identify solely as actors, the term *cast members* is appropriate in this instance for clarity and for context. My use of the term *cast member* over *dancer* does not suggest a belief in a hierarchical status of acting over dancing or vice versa; rather, I use the term to indicate their hybridity, indicating the reality that the paid performers are dancers *and* actors, who demonstrate the multiplicity of their skills *as* cast members during performances of the tandem dance that is *SNM*.

Structuring the Tandem Dance: Defining the "Track" and the "Score"

In presenting the idea of a *tandem dance*, there are two structures through which the cast members and spectators participate in dance in *SNM*. The first structure is the predetermined choreography, which is performed by the cast members, and it is dance that the spectators observe and experience as a nonlinear narrative. Dance operates differently for the spectators in that the second structure is an instructional score, designed to allow them to encounter the performance through improvisational

movement.[27] These two structures are different yet sometimes overlap in space and time. The cast members of *SNM* dance the narrative of *Macbeth*—its plot is presented through Doyle's predetermined choreography.[28] The predetermined choreography serves to immerse spectators by drawing them into scenes as they come upon action while wandering throughout the spaces in the building. The choreography of the physical relationships between characters, not the spoken text, is the dramaturgical focus of the work. The predetermined choreography was created by Doyle in collaboration with the cast members through improvisation and then established for performance. As described by Paul Zivkovich:

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[27] The concept of supplying spectators with instructional scores or instructional pieces to implement has a long history—most famously, perhaps, in the United States and Europe with Yoko Ono and Marina Abramović. In 1965, Yoko Ono performed *Cut Piece*, presenting her body to the audience as object to be manipulated, making herself vulnerable to their agency and action. *Cut Piece* was distilled to a set of instructions, Ono's body and the bodies of the audience, and a pair of scissors, the latter of which was used by the audience members in order to snip away Ono's clothing to slowly reveal her flesh. Ten years later, Marina Abramović pressed similarly upon these ideas of participation and interactivity with audiences most famously in her work *Rhythm 0,* in which audience members were provided with instructions that suggested that they could use seventy-two objects, including guns, razors, and knives, on Abramović's body as they desired. Scores within the dance field include those developed by John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, and Nancy Stark Smith, among others. Scores, when given to dancers, are interpreted in myriad ways; they are not identically repeatable but can be repeated through repetition of the instructions and reconstructed in part from memory. Instructional pieces and scores themselves are about exploration and investigation, which is what Barrett and Doyle intend audiences to do during *SNM*.
[28] "Macbeth is embedded in the multiple languages—sound, light, design, and dance—of *Sleep No More*" (Stacy 2009, 7). Alongside dance, it can also be said that the dramaturgy of the production is presented through the scenography of the building. While I will mention the scenography and its role in the dramaturgical impact of the "building as performer," a full discussion is beyond the scope of this article. Thus, I direct the reader to seek out other sources, particularly Snider 2012 and Worthen 2012.

> Maxine is an orchestrator. She's choreographing it, but she rarely choreographs a single step. It's the performers who create the movement language, and I think that's why the execution is honest and real. She's incredible at orchestrating a scene, orchestrating a work. (Zivkovich 2014, 10)

From this point on, I will refer to the predetermined choreography of the cast members as a *track* or *tracks*, the spatio-temporal terms used by Doyle and the cast members to describe the artistic labor during performances. Although I use the terms interchangeably, *track* is a composite term, including but not limited to the predetermined choreography itself. It refers to the various roles a cast member must perform each night.[29] The tracks for each character were developed through myriad resources including text, character study, and free-form and contact improvisations in order to most effectively represent the artistic directors' conceptualizations of different roles in performance. Tori Sparks, performer of Lady Macbeth and other roles in *SNM* from 2009 to 2013, suggests that the tracks are intended to facilitate immersion for the spectators by

> physically conveying this story and this narrative…invit[ing] people in a little bit closer. You don't have the voice separating you, speaking to you. The kinetic energy of the movement is moving through the space. The audience literally feels that. I hate to use the word *seductive* but it's one thing that comes to my mind. I feel like it draws people in, in this way, "Come closer; I'm trying to say something but it's not as loud as you're used to hearing." (Sparks 2014, 27–28)

In creating the tracks, Doyle's processes as a choreographer were shaped by the compositional structures and choreographic devices that have emerged from modern and contemporary dance practices established within the canon of Western concert dance over the past fifty years. She has specifically drawn upon conventions developed between

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[29] It is important to note that in any given performance, the cast members' tracks are different one from another, although they may share choreographic language and motifs, particularly in duet, trio, and group formations.

1960 and 1970, known as the postmodern period of dance in the United States.[30] From

that period, I suggest Doyle augments and extends four postmodernist dance

conventions—*pedestrian movement and practices of daily life, chance operations,*

contact improvisation (CI), and *site specificity or site sensitivity.* Doyle deploys the four

threads across both the tracks and the scores, particularly with the intention of impacting

spectators by providing them with opportunities to contribute movement to the event.

Through experimentation, she partnered these conventions with immersive practices such

as eye contact, touch, intimacy, and sensitivity to space (particularly sensitivities

developed by dancers in contact improvisation), which have existed in dance across the

long lineage of live performance. Immersive practices are broadly analyzed by Josephine

Machon in her comprehensive text, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in*

Contemporary Performance. For Machon, Punchdrunk has been a primary resource for

her research and in her writing she prioritizes Barrett's contributions, while Doyle is

referenced minimally.[31] I feel confident in stating that several of the strategies defined as

immersive practices by Machon, following her research on Punchdrunk and also

[30] The post-modern period in dance in the United States emerged through the influence of John Cage, who worked with both choreographer Merce Cunningham (his partner and longtime collaborator) and choreographer and dance educator Robert Ellis Dunn. Dunn was the founder of dance classes at the Judson Church in New York City, through which he encouraged his students to subvert existing principles of dance composition by applying iterations of concepts developed by Cage, Allan Kaprow, and others. Dunn's classes enabled new pedagogical and artistic frameworks for dance artists to question choreographic processes and challenge dancer/audience relationships. The events and happenings that emerged from these experiments and occurred at the Judson Church irrevocably changed dance in America and impacted the work of dance artists throughout Canada and the United Kingdom (Banes 1987, 1–19).
[31] Maxine Doyle is referenced six times in Machon's text; dance is referenced twenty-five times.

considering Doyle's background in dance, are practices directly derived from dance. These strategies, drawn specifically from dance, are what have made *SNM* so effectively immersive.

To clarify these strategies, and the ways in which I suggest they contribute to immersive performance, I present first the notion that by shifting from a formalized technique to the incorporation of *pedestrian movement and practices of daily life*, Doyle investigated new movement vocabularies that could be shared by both audiences and cast members. For example, as described in the scenario that began this paper, the cast member performing King Duncan engaged in pedestrian movement with the spectator (in this case, myself) as he wove pathways around furniture. This serves as an example of the kind of pedestrian movement incorporated into the tracks of the cast members, which can also be performed by spectators as they move through their scores, negotiating the scenographic elements and interactions with cast members.

Second, we can find in *SNM* explorations of probability similar to those of postmodernists as popularized by Cage and Cunningham's experimentation with *chance operations*, which encouraged investigation of choreographic practices beyond formalist compositional structures via choreographic devices.[32] Chance operations manifest themselves at a meta-level in the instructional scores themselves, as spectators make

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[32] I understand choreographic devices within dance as per the writings of Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin (1982) in their text, *The Intimate Act of Choreography*. In this text, they define choreographic devices, as "ways of developing nuggets of movement, thereby enriching and extending an initial movement in order to build a greater body of choreographic material" (92). I add to this definition the use of chance operations alongside the development of games, exercises, structures, tasks, and tools deployed through various processes to generate and select movement.

choices and decisions that affect the outcomes of their experiences. Chance operations in this way seem to exemplify Cunningham's idea that any movement could be dance and that any body, meaning any participant, could be viewed in some way as an "aesthetic conveyor" (Novack 1990, 53). The way improvisation is used in various ways in performance seems to facilitate physical interaction and to be a response to the call of some postmodernists for dancers to "participate equally, without applying arbitrary social hierarchies in the group" (58). In this way, *SNM* choreography echoes the sentiments of the postmodernists regarding the politics of participation and egalitarianism in relation to the authenticity of authorship.

Third, dance in immersive theater, insofar as I have experienced it, emphasizes *contact improvisation* (CI) as a movement practice to be explored by cast members and spectators.[33] CI focuses on the body's relationship to points in space, including other bodies, architectural elements, and objects. In addition to exploration of concepts of proxemics and spatiality as understood by practitioners of contact improvisation, Doyle utilizes CI to develop relationships between cast members, and between cast members and spectators. For cast members, Doyle deploys CI specifically to advance plot action and to focus audience attention on the architecture and scenography of the performance space, including the significance of objects to narrative. Doyle uses dance to deepen and

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[33] There are many definitions of contact improvisation and the one I offer expands CI beyond definitions from 1972 when CI emerged and was linked to partnering between two or more people: "Contact Improvisation is an open-ended exploration of the kinaesthetic possibilities of bodies moving through contact. Sometimes wild and athletic, sometimes quiet and meditative, it is a form open to all bodies and enquiring minds" (Ray Chung workshop announcement cited in "About Contact Improvisation [CI]" 2009).

broaden the characters. It also affords them three-dimensionality and nuance through which they can express their emotions. For example, there is not extensive information about the personal relationship between Macduff and Lady Macduff in Shakespeare's play.[34] To provide depth for these characters and characterize their relationship, Doyle choreographs detailed and nuanced movement interactions between the Macduffs that provides new perspectives into their union. One of the spectators I interviewed, Cheryl LaFrance, corroborates this perspective. LaFrance, a former high school English teacher who has taught *Macbeth* approximately twenty times over fifteen years, reported that

> the Lady Macduff and Macduff duet on the armoire and then again in the parlor on the two couches was so moving.…The relationship of those two characters doesn't get much chance to develop in the play whereas here [during the performance] it did through the dancing. (LaFrance 2014, 17)

LaFrance is referring to a moment on the second floor in the Macduff's living quarters where the cast members portraying Macduff and Lady Macduff perform a duet in very small space, approximately three feet by three feet between the armoire and the ceiling. The Macduffs shift horizontally in the space, passing over and under each other and sometimes colliding with one another and the walls on either side. Their choreography is reminiscent of waves of water in a channel slapping roughly upon the sides of the embankment that contains them. At the end of the duet, Lady Macduff pushes Macduff up in the air with the strength of her legs, and he is suspended against the ceiling, hovering over the audience. It is an impressive and dramatic dance, which I interpret as a complex relational moment wherein Lady Macduff expresses her frustration at what she

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[34] Lady Macduff as a character appears briefly in the fourth act of Shakespeare's text and often is considered a minor, albeit significant, character.

perceives to be her husband's disloyalty while Macduff himself battles with the

instability of his emotions following the murder of King Duncan.

It is through strategies brought from contact improvisation—such as the

democratization of gender roles, no leaders and interchangeable partners, and situations

created through action and response—that we see the role of Lady Macduff deeply

elaborated in *SNM* so as to trigger LaFrance's perception of character development.

Contact improvisation can be understood as a form in and of itself, requiring nothing

more to exist as an art form. However, in *SNM*, Doyle uses the principles listed above to

craft rich personas for the characters and complex relationships between characters.

While, for the most part, spectators are not engaged in the kinds of contact improvisation

such as weight sharing and partnering performed by the cast members, they are adapting

to other bodies in space, negotiating situations through action and response, and

exploring the ideas of no leaders/interchangeable partners as they move along pathways

that are not predetermined.[35] In addition, contact improvisation can be applied in order to

minimize physical boundaries between spectators and dancers and encourage

explorations of space, its structure, and the objects therein. Many spectators come in

contact with furniture by sitting on it, moving it—others can be seen applying weight,

and testing its stability in processes similar to the cast members, while still others may

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[35] The principles of contact improvisation include the democratization of gender roles, no leaders, and interchangeable partners; contact improvisation understood as a form in and of itself, requiring nothing more to exist as art; the orientation of the body can be challenged so there is no "front"; pathways are not predetermined and allowed to unfold over time and space; spatial exploration is encouraged; movement and movement ideas flow through space and others; situations are created through action and response (adapted from Novack 1990, 114–49).

find themselves climbing over it in order to make way for a duet or trio of dancers engaging in CI. As the spectators must continually reorient themselves from room to room and from perspective to perspective within rooms, they serve as choreographic partners to one another in the spaces traversed. The groupings of people may change as cast members and spectators make curatorial decisions throughout, like whether or not they engage specifically in weight-sharing and bodily contact such as defined by CI with fellow audience members or dancers.

Last, the dance in *SNM* prioritizes *site specificity or site sensitivity* (including designed scenography) to create possibilities for both cast members and spectators to experience spaces of performance differently, via broadly conceptualized ideas of proxemics and notions of intimacy. Doyle asserts that the concept of site sensitivity rather than site specificity was emphasized in designing the extensive and intricate scenography of *SNM*. The space was constructed (rather than adapted, as site-specific works often are) with the intention of immersing spectators in worlds that provoke reaction to objects and actions while leaving them generally free to improvise their movement paths. Included within this site-sensitive design are multitudes of surfaces that offer opportunities to climb and sit and otherwise make contact within the space. As a spectator, I had to climb on the back of a sofa to get out of the way of the performance while other spectators described audiences lying in beds and bathtubs. Examples of the contact improvisation techniques used by the dancers include counterbalancing, weight-sharing, and free-falling onto supportive yet yielding surfaces such as bed mattresses and upholstered chairs and sofas. Some spectators, after witnessing the dancers' performances, find themselves

physically exploring their own impulses through reenactments of the choreography, thus augmenting the performance and adding to its dance content with their own interpretive actions.[36]

It is important to note that a crossover exists between the two structures, as cast members sometimes find it necessary to improvise moments within their tracks and spectators reproduce and manipulate movement motifs performed by cast members through improvisational tactics in their scores.[37] Maxine Doyle's interest as a choreographer is in "developing a performer who can be outside themselves looking in…so, how to be compositionally alive in the moment of improvisation" so that cast members can easily move between skills to continue to facilitate immersion for spectators (Doyle 2013, 5). At times, an intersection of a track and a score can occur when a cast member invites a spectator to react to his or her movement. An example of this is described by Tony Bordonaro:

> I'm sensing the energy from [a spectator]…if someone's right in my space and interested and interacting with me, then I'll ask them to take my jacket off. It's like feeling that out and…how it needs to change based on the person. Because I'm alive in the performance. (Bordonaro 2014, 43)

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[36] A significant number of spectators and dancers I have interviewed have reported that this kind of physicalized, participatory behavior can be witnessed on a regular basis by participants, albeit not by all of them. The cast members report witnessing it on a more frequent basis than spectators, as they are present more often in the space.

[37] Blom and Chaplin identify "16 ways to manipulate a movement motif," which are repetition, retrograde, inversion, size (condense/expand), tempo, rhythm, quality, instrumentation (different body parts), force, background, staging, embellishment, changes of planes/levels, additive/incorporative, fragmentation, and combination (1982, 102–4).

When Tony Bordonaro is performing Banquo and stops near a spectator to make eye contact, this is his invitation for engagement. If the spectator chooses to take the jacket, there can be a complex moment of choreographic exchange including the bodies of performers (Banquo and the spectator), a prop (the jacket), the space (between performers and any witnesses), effort/energy (how the jacket is passed between the performers), and time (the duration of the exchange). Having both personally witnessed this moment of exchange involving another spectator and participated in it myself, I understand it as a dance of negotiation, with Tony orienting himself to the spectator using understanding of his "back space" and using subtle gestures of his scapula to initiate a response from the spectators. The spectator's response is never predictable and always varies in terms of body, space, and time. It is a dance in which both performers assert and accede power while contributing to a moment of performance through their actions.

Dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster discusses the improvising dancer as moving between "the known and the unknown, between the familiar/reliable and the unanticipated/unpredictable" (2003, 3) and specifies the "known" as "any pre-determined over-arching structural guidelines that delimit the improvising body's choices" (4). The instructional score Doyle and Barrett provide to the spectators of *SNM* is in many ways both known/unknown; the spectators are expected to shape and guide their own participation, although the score provides moments wherein spectators may engage in ways in which they were not aware they would or could engage. The instructional score is designed to encourage improvisational movement choices such as this, which impact the spectators' cognitive, affective and, particularly, their *physical* engagement. The score

is minimally structured and emphasizes an open system in which spectators are "free range" across the performance. The score consists of a short list of instructions, articulated to spectators by a hostess just before they enter the performance space via a trip on an elevator. These instructions include (1) keep your mask on at all times, (2) do not speak, (3) do not use mobile phones, (4) things are not as they seem and, (5) fortune favors the bold. The instructions can be and often are interpreted differently by spectators during performances; however, it is the last instruction that is perhaps the most important (and most broadly interpreted), for when spectators are released from the elevator, they must physically navigate the *SNM* world if they wish to encounter experiences.

The unknown, as defined by Foster, is "that which is unimaginable, that which we could not have thought of doing next,"—a definition I find particularly fitting for the spectators who enter *SNM* (Foster 2003, 4). While it may be assumed that many knew they were going to some sort of event (unless it was a surprise by a friend or loved one), many, at least in the first few years, did not imagine that *they* themselves were the event. Lastly, Foster argues that "the performance of any action, regardless of how predetermined it is in the mind of those who perform it and those who witness it, contains an element of improvisation" (4), and I use this definition of improvisation to guide my understanding of spectator movement in *SNM*. In performing the score, the spectators are afforded opportunities to witness the dance performances of the cast members (and that of other spectators) and cast themselves as dancers through their own agentive and interventionist movement choices, which add to the totality of the production's choreographic content. While Foster's writing was in response to observing/participating

in improvisation in contexts other than immersive performance, as the form had not yet

emerged in 2003, Foster's words regarding improvisational practice, when considered

alongside *SNM*, seem prescient in regard to the possibility of a tandem dance of

spectators and cast members. Foster's ideas take on even greater significance when the

dichotomy between viewer and performer, as she refers to participants here, is

eliminated:

> Improvisation empowers those who witness it and as well as those who perform
> it. Watching improvisation, consciousness expands out of passive reception of an
> event and toward active engagement in the actual making of the event. Viewers
> participate along with the performers in the open field of possible choices and the
> performers' construction and selection of those choices through which meaning is
> determined. (9)

Due to the free-range structure of *SNM*, an "open field of possible choices" exists with

the possibilities of risk and indeterminacy for both spectators and cast members. With the

idea of risk-taking as an inherent component of the *SNM* structure, the statement "fortune

favors the bold" is indicative of destabilizing, engendering movement choices by

spectators that can surprise him/herself as well as any witnesses observing the actions.

Tori Sparks describes the unknowns and risks for cast members as follows:

> In the performances there are always these unknowns that you contend with that
> you already know before you go out there. Something's going to happen that we
> didn't fix, something that we didn't rehearse…and those are the types of moments
> in the performance that can be very exciting or disastrous or whatever. In this type
> of work, you have—what like, four hundred audience members—so four hundred
> unknowns plus all the other things that might happen, plus your partnerships [with
> cast members] so you are constantly shape-shifting and addressing things [while]
> nonetheless carrying out very structured scene work, so that your story—even
> though it might not be completely linear to person that's viewing you—is played
> out to its fullest. (Tori Sparks in Doyle et al. 2012, 7)

Tony Bordonaro, cast member from 2011 to the present, performing Banquo and other

roles, frames the "open field" for spectators as freedom in saying:

> What's so great about this immersive performance, and *Sleep No More*
> specifically, is that the audience…isn't led anywhere. They get to choose where
> they go. So their perception of what the piece is formed by them. You know? We
> talk…about how we can help them and guide them, but essentially the freedom is
> all theirs. (Bordonaro 2014, 26)

By allowing the audience this freedom and proximity, the creators of *SNM* are

capitalizing upon and benefiting from the "curatorial me" phenomenon as articulated by

Bill Ivey and Stephen Tepper, director and associate director, respectively, of the Curb

Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University (Ivey and Tepper

2006, B6). As noted in their 2006 article, "Cultural Renaissance or Cultural Divide?" the

"curatorial me" phenomenon acknowledges that cultural products in Western society are

increasingly designed for the population "bubble" of youth born between the early 1980s

and 2000, known as the "millennials." *SNM* is reliant upon the exploratory behaviors of

the millennials, as well as those from other generations, including but not limited to those

who enjoy the hypertextuality of the Internet (particularly the introduction of Web 2.0

platforms) and those whose lives are shaped by video-gaming and the proliferation of

video-gaming practices in media and entertainment, also referred to as the "gamification"

of theater (Reilly 2014).[38] Hypertextuality and gamification have influenced the appetites

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[38] The term *gamification* is used in many contexts, including in the workplace and in
educational contexts and is understood as using game structures to motivate people
toward goals. In relation to performance, I refer to Megan Reilly's definition, in which
she suggests that, "the term 'gamification' refers to using game mechanics in non-game
situations. Many believe that understanding what draws people to games can be used to
draw in audiences that might not attend traditional theater" (Reilly 2014).

of individuals across generations who crave a personalization and customization of their experiences. Increasingly, individuals are engaging beyond passive attendance by acting as their own curators and synthesizing the abundance of choices that exist in live performance, in the media, and online to forge their own entertainment and identities.

In his book, *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else*, art critic and editor David Balzer explores how the concept and practice of curating informs the ways in which individuals consume culture. Balzer defines curationism as "the acceleration of the curatorial impulse to become a dominant way of thinking and being" (2015, 2) and suggests that since the mid-1990s—a prime "millennial" decade— the verb *curate* has been used to "refer to any number of things we do and consume on a daily basis" (10). What is most interesting to note from Balzer's research—and most applicable to my argument—is his historical analysis of the term *curator* and its connection to and deployment of improvisational practices. Balzer, connecting the term *curating* with French ethnologist Claude Levi-Strauss's concept of *bricolage* through the writing of Patrick Wilcken, suggests that the bricoleur is "a tinkerer, an improviser working with what was at hand, cobbling together solutions to both practical and aesthetic problems" (Wilcken quoted in Balzer 2015, 23). The spectators in *SNM*, in their efforts to gain understanding and make their way through an unknown world, are engaging in bricolage/curationism to collect experiences. I suggest that it is through engagement in the instructional, improvisational movement score offered by Doyle and Barrett that spectators curate and collect experiences of dance. In doing so, they refine their knowledge of movement through skills of mobility within the *SNM* world,

demonstrating the "vital concept of connoisseurship; a display of taste or expertise that lends stylistic independence to the act of caring for and assembling" (Balzer 2015, 27). The fact that individuals are already curating their lives (Balzer gives examples such as the curating of iPod playlists and Facebook pages) in combination with the reality that spectators of *SNM* come from diverse demographics enables them to transfer their knowledge and attitudes to curate their own experiences.

During *SNM*, spectators apply knowledge from their own backgrounds while also learning from one another in the moment, through observation and replication of actions. In discussing the many different populations that are drawn to *SNM*, associate choreographer Conor Doyle explains that:

> The wonderful thing about being in this show…I think if you go to see a dance show in London…it's the same twenty people at every show.…I think it is the same in New York…but this [show]…we've got people who are into dance, people who are into theater, people who have never seen a play in their life, people who like video games, people who like film.…The amount of people who come and watch the show…they are not all theater or dance people…and you kind of get to perform to an audience you've never seen in your life. (Conor Doyle in Miguel Sagaz 2012)

In considering Conor Doyle's suggestion that not all people coming to *SNM* are familiar with dance, it follows then that many of these people find themselves in the "unknown" yet are skilled enough with the "known" aspects and processes of curating (which includes improvising) in other realms to combine their previous knowledge and tactics with the "known" instructional score given by Doyle and Barrett. In an interview with spectator Jim Stark, a computer programmer and visual artist who has attended *SNM* multiple times, he corroborates the idea of individuals involving themselves through

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various pathways in saying, "That's the Punchdrunk way of doing it. Try to engage as many of the senses as possible. And…even if it's a crowd of people, make each person in the crowd feel like they're personally involved" (Stark 2014, 44). If *SNM*'s popularity is any indication, the practices employed by Doyle and Barrett, while catering to intergenerational tastes and interests, are bridging gaps for spectators unfamiliar with contemporary dance and allowing entrée into a world saturated with moving images and embodied action.

Containing the Tandem Dance: The Language of Space

SNM takes place across six floors and one hundred rooms of the performance space constructed to resemble the McKittrick Hotel, the setting of Hitchcock's film *Vertigo*. The scenography, conceptualized and designed by Barrett, is incredibly detailed and includes thousands of artifacts and objects, ranging across a spectrum of tableware such as china teacups to hundreds of taxidermy animals. The spaces are designed to provoke sensory responses, from the feel of a gravel surface under feet in the cemetery, to the smell of Hecate's apothecary, to the many perspectives and viewing angles one can access within the ballroom. As Doyle describes it, the "building [is] a massive player, probably the biggest performer" of *SNM*, and I suggest that the space exists as an entity in and of itself, telling stories whether dance is present or not (Doyle et al. 2012, 4). In creating the saturated space that would be the immersive world of *SNM*, Doyle credits Barrett as the primary instigator of Punchdrunk's interest in "spreading stories across huge, transformed sites" through his deconstruction of classic texts via their physical properties, including smells, sounds, and textures (3). Doyle explains that

we won't go into spaces that are conventionally used for theater. The bigger the space, and the more challenging a space, the more excited we get by it. [Felix] found that when he was placing a play within these contexts…that spoken word to him really didn't match up…when the space is quite magnificent, the audiences are excited by that and when they came across the text, the spoken text, it felt safe, it felt mundane…how to invent a performance style to somehow match the challenge of these spaces? (3)

As a choreographer, Doyle wanted "pull out the emotional realities of the…text and the characters and [to try] to find a way that huge emotions were played out physically" (3). In turn, she had to confront the challenge of situating dance in the huge spaces that Punchdrunk decided to inhabit. She recalls that in building *SNM*,

the most interesting for me in that experience was—how does the performer stand up to these buildings, these spaces which are epic [with] the lights, sound and texture thrown on them and try to make the experience really intense for an audience? Where is the performer's role in that? (4)

For Doyle, much like the postmodernists pushing against traditional notions of space in dances of the 1960s and 1970s, positions the space as an antagonist or "provocateur," prompting the creation of challenging choreography for the cast members. Doyle worked first with the cast members in the studio, exploring concepts drawn from the text to generate movement material and building duets through contact improvisation. She then transposed the material into the space itself, using the properties of the space, including furniture, objects, and walls, among other surfaces, to generate additional movement material, so that there would be "a sense of the architecture feeding language" (Doyle 2013, 4). As cast member Leslie Krause describes, "You pretty much dance on furniture, like a huge double bed, a dresser, or even a wall. I almost never dance with my feet on the floor" (Krause quoted in Poon and Perron 2013). For spectators, Doyle and Barrett

designed the space so they could "manage and manipulate an audience experience…so you can go from the intimate to the epic," meaning creating opportunities for spectators to share a small room with a cast member one moment and in the next, encounter hundreds of other spectators in the ballroom (Doyle 2013, 6).

Numerous spectators describe their immediate attraction to the space itself. Some are drawn to its magnitude, others to its private corners, and still others to both. Chloe Finore, a cartoonist, who has attended *SNM* over fifty times, describes her first encounter with the space:

> I sort of felt very swept up into it. It's kind of the perfect storm of so many things I like: dance and Shakespeare and pre-war interior designs. I spent a lot of time going through the sets and I was impressed with how cinematic everything was…no matter where you stood. (Finore 2014, 2)

Gina Marie Hayes describes her first experience in the space as:

> It was a like [cast members] were becoming a part of the space by dancing in it…it was like the whole hotel was an organism because [cast members] were interacting with it in that particular style of dance in such an intense way. The first time I went, even probably up until the third or fourth time I had gone, it's really difficult to sort of get a handle on where things are and which stairwells are which—and I think, on purpose, the space is very confusing in that way. And then over time, it's like you get the sense memory…that you just know, even if you're not really thinking about it, if I want to get down to…the porter bell desk or whatever…your body just remembers how to get there. So you can feel like it goes on forever…there's this sort of infinite possibility in the space. (Hayes 2014, 7)

The above quote by Hayes suggest the ways in which space as "provocateur" acts on spectators by shaping how they observe the movement of the cast members as directed by Doyle as well as the ways in which space beckons and shapes the journeys of spectators themselves. The "building as primary player/performer" speaks to the spectator through

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the language of space, a language whose syntax is enriched by Barrett's sensual and intricate scenography and embellished with the choreography of Doyle, which serves to entice spectators further and further into the unknown realms of *SNM*.

Challenging the Tandem Dance: Questions about Improvisation and Intention

In considering that the spectators are physically embedded within and implicated in *SNM* through the tandem dance, I acknowledge that the reader may be questioning whether spectators are moving with the intention of making aesthetic statements to be appreciated by themselves or others. Efficacy of experience for spectators in *SNM* is not dependent on spectators perceiving themselves as dancers or understanding their movements as a dance. Rather, Doyle and Barrett enable efficacy of experience by setting the spectators' bodies in motion via the instructional score as a mode of problem solving within an environment that is indeterminate and in flux. In most cases, the spectators' actions are not predetermined upon the first encounter with the production but are manifested rather through the tandem dance in multiple ways.[39]

First, a spectator's awareness and understanding of his or her movements may be incidental to their experience of *SNM*. This is to say that spectators may or may not have cognitive awareness of *what* they are doing (what actions their bodies are performing in motion) and *how* they are moving (meaning the deployment of types and scales of energies and efforts) since they are absorbed—cognitively, affectively, and physically— in executing action in the moment. Additionally, they may not perceive their movements

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[39] As mentioned earlier in the paper, some spectators attend repeatedly, and this can therefore predetermine the ways in which they will experience *SNM*.

having any impact within the performance, although they may have a heightened

awareness of their physical engagement during participation. Second, what and how the

spectators perform is, in fact, incidental to the compositional structure of the event. For

the most part, movement choices by spectators have minimal impact on the cast

members' tracks. That said, the spectator(s) can interrupt the tracks, and the choice(s) to

do so can challenge the conditions of *SNM*. Interruption of a cast member's track can be

incidental (often accidental as well) or intentional; some spectators consciously challenge

the ontological status of being incidental to *SNM* through interruption and/or disruption

while other spectators choose to remediate their initial experiences of being incidental by

returning to the event multiple times to refine their tactics of participation.

Last, since spectators are conceptualized by Doyle and Barrett as guests of the

McKittrick Hotel and invited to participate as embedded agents within the *SNM* world,

their movements and actions are an intentional component of the event and meant to be

witnessed by the cast members and other spectators. I argue then that the spectators'

performance of the instructional score, which includes contributions of new movement

language and modified movement motifs based on the language of cast members, can be

witnessed as an improvisational tandem dance with that of the cast members. The

intentional art of *SNM* is, then, *not* limited to the dance choreographed by Doyle and

performed by the cast members, nor is the art of *SNM* limited to the intricate and awe-

inspiring scenography conceived and implemented by Barrett. As clarified by Tim Heck
from a conversation with Paul Zivkovich:

> Paul did say this: the one note he wishes he could give everybody [in the cast] is
> to remember that we are an element in the show. We are not *THE* star of the show.
> We are actually supporting cast to the lights and sound and audience." (Heck
> 2014, 40; emphasis in the original)

Rather, the art of *SNM* is the immersive, interactive, and participatory process of
encountering experience through motion, a process facilitated through dance.

In considering *SNM* as an immersive performance that is mediated and realized
through the tandem dance of cast members and spectators, I propose that Maxine Doyle
and Felix Barrett have created a new performance model. This model centralizes dance as
a medium and method in conjunction with immersive practices, extending the
conventions of dance to include the movement of the spectators alongside the cast
members to create an efficacious immersive performance. The success of *SNM* suggests
that the discourse surrounding immersive practices could benefit from—as well as
contribute to—deeper analyses of the impact of dance in new performance models in
order to advance scholarship in the fields of both dance and immersive performance. We
don't yet know how dance may be conceived, created, and presented in the future based
on the influence of productions such as *SNM*. We do know, however, what dance as an
immersive production is beginning to look like and how dance and immersive practices
are informing and affecting one another, in particular, how both can extend the
conventions of movement for spectators during performance.

Via the information I have gathered through interviews and my own experiences with *SNM*, this paper suggests the ways in which Doyle has deployed dance to resonate with and attract new audiences to contemporary dance via innovative performance environments, offering creative agency and parameters for meaning making beyond that experienced in traditional dance contexts while simultaneously enriching immersive theater practices. Through opportunities to engage in instructional scores and choreographic devices tactically crafted by the artistic directors via improvisational dance, spectators are finding ways to position themselves as spectators, dancers, curators, and the curated, while expanding notions of themselves as agents in societies and economies that are increasingly co-created and shared.

Figure 2. Nicholas Bruder, Sophie Bortolussi, and audience members in Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More.* (l–r) Nicholas Bruder as Macbeth and Sophie Bortolussi as Lady Macbeth with audience members in Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* (New York, 2011–). Photograph by Robin Roemer.

Figure 3. Nicholas Bruder, Sophie Bortolussi, and audience member in Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More.* (l-r) Nicholas Bruder as Macbeth and Sophie Bortolussi as Lady Macbeth with audience member in Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* (New York, 2011–). Photograph by Yaniv Schulman.

Figure 4. Tori Sparks and Eric Jackson Bradley in Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More*.
(l-r) Tori Sparks as Lady Macbeth with Eric Jackson Bradley as Macbeth in
Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* (New York, 2011–). Photograph by Yaniv Schulman.
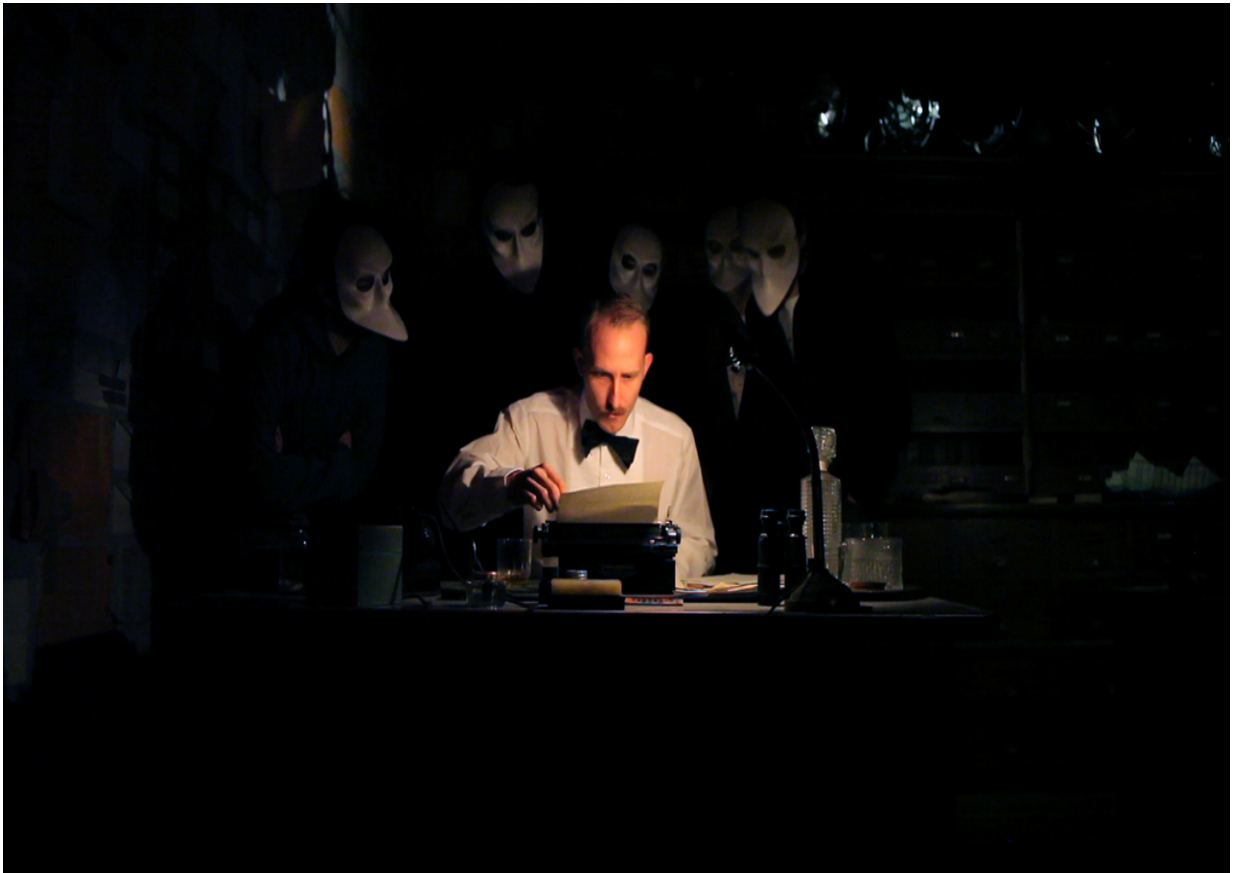
Figure 5. Matthew Oaks with audience members in Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More.*
Matthew Oaks (center) as Malcolm with audience members in
Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* (New York, 2011–). Photograph by Yaniv Schulman.

CHAPTER V

THE ACTION FRAMEWORK: ANALYZING CHOREOGRAPHY AS "CAPTURE"

IN THIRD RAIL PROJECT'S *THEN SHE FELL*

"You come highly recommended," says the woman. I did not see or hear her enter

the waiting room of the doctor's office, where I sit. When I turn to face her, she is already

advancing toward me with long strides and quickly engulfs the space between us. As she

hovers over me, I have the sense that everything about her is oversized: her expansive

arms are bent at sharp angles so her long-fingered hands frame her sharply cocked hips,

which are balanced on top of her endless legs. She locks her enormous eyes onto mine.

Nestled in a tangle of red curls is a huge top hat, which she tips to me as her face widens

into an infinite smile. Keeping an eye on me, she again crosses the room with gigantic

steps and opens a door with a flourish. With her hand resting on the doorknob, she turns

her head to survey the room beyond the door, pausing a moment before slowly swinging

her gaze back to me. The contents of the room beyond the door are out of my view and

now I am curious about whom or what it contains. Her inviting stance, her direct

attention, and the wide berth of the door compel me to follow her out of the waiting room

and into an atelier filled with all styles of hats. "Choose one," she directs, and I comply

by pointing at a fedora on a shelf. She immediately dismisses my choice and proceeds to

place on my head a series of alternatives until she is satisfied. "Much better…" she

remarks, in approval of the pillbox hat I am now wearing. "Can you write a letter?" she

asks, and as I nod she is already setting up a small writing desk with paper, an inkwell,

and a fountain pen. She proceeds to deliver her message—a missive to Lewis Carroll, in

which she berates him for not ever giving her a name in his stories—at breakneck speed.

I attempt to meet the pace of her dictation, but I fail and end up soaking my fingers and

the paper with ink. She lifts the ruined letter gingerly from the desk while staring at me.

She glances first at the now incomprehensible letter and then at me, for what seems a

very long time. Then she crumples the letter into a ball with her fist and tosses it over her

shoulder while unceremoniously plucking the hat off my head. As she ushers me quickly

out the door, I glimpse that my ruined letter has landed on top of thousands of similarly

crumpled-up and discarded letters, which fill a corner of the atelier. Clearly, I am not the

first person to have failed at the Hatter's task; the evidence of our botched attempts to

assist the Hatter in communicating outside her reality now remains as artifacts in the

scenography of this world.

    This was my first experience with the Hatter, as performed by Elizabeth Carena, who

originated the role in the critically acclaimed production of *Then She Fell* (*TSF*), created

by the multi-awarding-winning company Third Rail Projects (fig. 6).[40] *TSF* is an

immersive production based upon the life and writings of Lewis Carroll (aka Charles

Dodgson), including *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*,

and his relationship with Alice Liddell, the real child who inspired the stories. Third Rail

was awarded a 2012–2013 New York Dance and Performance Bessie Award for

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[40] Third Rail received two New York Dance and Performance Awards (Bessies) for their production of *Vanishing Point*—one for composer Kris Bauman and the other for choreographers Tom Pearson and Zach Morris. Jennine Willett is credited among other collaborative artists and performers in *Vanishing Point* on Third Rail's website (Third Rail Projects 2015c).

Outstanding Production for *TSF*, which was also named a New York Times Critic's

Pick/Top Ten for 2013 by theater critic Ben Brantley.[41] Described by the *New Yorker* as

"wonderfully written, directed and choreographed" ("*Then She Fell*" 2013), *TSF* had

been performed over two thousand times before sold-out audiences as of April 2016.[42]

Figure 6. Elizabeth Carena in Third Rail Project's *Then She Fell*. Elizabeth Carena (Hatter) in Third Rail Project's *Then She Fell* (New York, 2012–). Photograph by Rick Ochoa.

[41] *TSF* is lauded on the Bessies' awards web page: "Outstanding Production: Zach Morris, Tom Pearson and Jennine Willett's *Then She Fell* for Third Rail Projects at Arts@Renaissance and Kingsland Ward at St. Johns, for using dance and fractured text to create a dreamscape as compelling and disorienting as Alice in Wonderland's original journey" (The Bessies 2013).
[42] On April 2, 2016, Third Rail celebrated its two thousandth performance of *TSF*. It had appeared before over twenty-five thousand audience members and run for three years in New York City (Third Rail Projects 2016).

Tom Pearson, Jennine Willett, and Brian Weaver met as students in the Dance

Department of Florida State University, founding the company Third Rail Dance in 2001.

Weaver's departure to work abroad in 2003 provided the opportunity for Zach Morris to

join as a guest artist for a project in 2004 and then become co–artistic director in 2005.

With the addition of Morris, the artistic and administrative structure continued as a trio of

collaborating artistic directors; in 2008, they incorporated as Third Rail Projects. Based in

Brooklyn, New York, the company now describes their mission as "dedicated to

reframing dance and performance, and bringing art to the public through an array of

media and within a variety of contexts including site-specific performances, dance

theater, installation art, video and multi-media projects, and immersive performance

environments" (Third Rail Projects 2012).

Third Rail operates as a polyvocal entity, with Morris, Pearson, and Willett leading

an ensemble of dancers and other artist-collaborators. Their strengths as individuals—

Zach's skills in staging and structure as a trained director, Tom's abilities in visual arts

and installation in combination with his dance background, and Jennine's deep movement

perspectives from her work as a choreographer and as a dancer in the works of other

choreographers—provide a triumvirate through which multiple voices and contributions

can filter. Third Rail compounded its polyvocality through the creation of *TSF*, when it

began conceiving of audiences as potential "scene partners" (Pearson 2014, 34).[43] This

conceptualization led Third Rail to design structures intended to enhance possibilities for

[43] Tom Pearson explained that when training new dancers to perform roles in *TSF*, he
informs them that, "every audience member that comes in is your new scene partner"
(Pearson 2014, 34).

audience interaction, inclusion, and immersion in the production. By designing opportunities for audiences to participate as scene partners, Third Rail increased the complexity of the audience's engagement with *TSF* through the development of strategies that prioritized the integration of dance, choreography, and immersive practices.

In this chapter, I describe Third Rail's process for creating Wonderland as a fully immersive choreographic structure—which I call an *action framework*—including how the company assessed and incorporated knowledge gained from earlier productions that also contained *Alice in Wonderland* themes. I then discuss how the action framework involves audiences in the production. Following Ric Allsopp and André Lepecki's theory of choreography as "an apparatus of capture," I argue that the production captures the audience through its character-driven choreography and structures of proposal and response (Allsopp and Lepecki 2008, 3). Finally, I consider audience perceptions of *TSF*'s apparatus of capture, which audience members experience as interactive and intimate.

Choreographing the Action Framework: A World for "Intuitive Engagement"

Dance theorist and critic Gerald Siegmund states, "The founding principle of our Western theatrical experience is the split…the institution of theatre as a split space" (2005, 26). By this, Siegmund means that the space of theater has been historically divided through the situating of audience as passive and the performers as active. This sets out the philosophical question that artists working with immersive practices must confront—the split between audience and performer is always present. Artists attempt to address this split by inventing strategies to bridge the divide between audience and

performer. Third Rail's concern with acknowledging this split shaped their conceptualization of *TSF* and spurred them to develop the structure that I call the *action framework* to bridge the divide.

Between 2009 and 2012, Third Rail created three distinct projects related to the *Alice in Wonderland* theme—*Steampunk Haunted House,* the One New York Plaza Creative Residency, and *Looking Glass*—that the company regards as early iterations of *TSF*. Through these works, Third Rail refined their audience engagement strategies to create *TSF*. In October each year from 2009 to 2011, Third Rail created and presented a new version of their *Steampunk Haunted House* at Abrons Art Center, part of Henry Street Settlement. Third Rail approached the space of the Abrons Arts Center—regularly used for traditional proscenium theater performances—as a venue for a site-specific project, having audiences enter the basement and travel through backstage areas.

In 2011 *Steampunk Haunted House* overlapped with a commission from Arts Brookfield for a creative residency at One New York Plaza in Manhattan.[44] Morris worked there between January 2011 and March 2012 in the Art Space, the area where artists' work is exhibited, on the concourse level, to create three installations, *A Series of*

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[44] Third Rail has maintained an ongoing relationship with Arts Brookfield since their first commission in 2006. Arts Brookfield "invigorates public spaces through the presentation of free cultural experiences in Brookfield's premier buildings around the world. By commissioning, producing, and presenting world-class works of art, Arts Brookfield supports creativity and innovation in the fields of music, dance, theater, film, and visual art. These events offer artists unique opportunities to work in new and unusual spaces while providing provocative cultural experiences for tenants and visitors alike" (Arts Brookfield 2015).

Reveals, *Rogue's Gallery*, and *Installations & Ephemera*, through which Third Rail continued their exploration of Carroll's *Alice* texts.[45]

The following summer, Morris, Pearson, and Willett extended visual and scenic ideas from the One New York Plaza residency and incorporated dancers and choreography to research the *Alice* texts further through the site-specific dance performance event *Looking Glass.* First performed in the Bank of America Plaza in Los Angeles in June 2011, *Looking Glass* was a free performance on thirty-minute loops over a two-hour period. Audiences watched dancers perform across the lawns, in a water fountain, and up and down staircases, among other spaces of the plaza.[46] Willett explains the types of information that she, Morris, and Pearson gained through these projects regarding engaging audiences and how that informed their decision making for *TSF*:

> With the last haunted house, we decided that we would really push it. Like the second haunted house, we had more dance in it and it was a little bit more free roaming. People didn't have to follow the traditional trajectory of a promenade theater. They were able to walk around a little more, and they were guided by people. But they had more chances to experience and find the art installations …and that was OK. But then we…decided that we wanted to go back to promenading to control things so that people would connect the dots better. It's fascinating when people are encountering you [as a dancer] that way, but we wanted to have more time to encounter people. (Willett 2014, 17)

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[45] As described on the Third Rail website, the installations at One New York Plaza "evoked the dense, lush, dream-like worlds that are a hallmark of Morris's projects, and are part of a series of incremental revelations in which audiences got increasingly deeper glimpses both into the artist's creative process and into the art space itself" (Third Rail Projects 2015b).

[46] After the performances at the Bank of America Plaza in Los Angeles, *Looking Glass* was adapted to three different locations in New York City: One New York Plaza; Zuccotti Park; and the World Financial Center Winter Garden, now known as Brookfield Place (Third Rail Projects 2015a)

In order to better guide audiences and afford the dancers more opportunities to encounter audiences during performances of *TSF*, Third Rail developed what Morris describes as "intuitive modes of audience engagement" (2014, 28). Morris explains that he and his colleagues worked to "craft a world where—where the audience intuitively knows what to do…so they're actually—they're making the decision of where to go and not having us have to force them" (57). To create the conditions for audience participants to consent to serve as scene partners, Third Rail designed what I am calling an *action framework*, as noted earlier. The action framework is the intentional merging of what are often seen as separate tasks or different aspects of a production—choreography, scenography, and dramaturgy—into one schematic structure that supports the intuitive choices of audiences wishing to engage in the immersive performance. The action framework includes predetermined choreography as well as a series of choreographed movement and speech proposals through which audiences are engaged as scene partners throughout the performance. Thus, the action framework is not staging, it is not blocking, and it is beyond dramaturgy; it is a structured designed to allow audiences to engage in specific ways with dancers during performances.

Intuition is generally accepted as a subconscious process, which assists individuals in determining the correct action to take. In *TSF* the movement and speech proposals of the dancers are carefully crafted to enable audience members to provide responses that serve the performance, such as choosing the correct door from which to exit to another scene, and to understand that they are asked to accomplish a task and do so effectively—so they

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can move easily (intuitively) through the world of *TSF*. Morris equates intuitive

structures with user-friendly design, saying:

> If you can create that intuitive way that an audience can intersect with a work regardless of what the medium of the work is…then they can really find themselves in it, and I think that's incredibly powerful…if your piece is user-friendly—you can figure out really fast if it's not, because it'll blow up in your face. For me, it has become about an entirely different set of choreographic directorial controls that can create that that intuitive audience engagement. In some cases, it is about like what angle your sternum faces in relation to an audience…or…you hand them something in this part of the scene or another part of the scene that then allows them to be a little bit lost or to lose themselves in the unfolding scene. It's about creating intuitive audience moments where our performers are able to be there, be who they are, do their jobs, do what they need to do in the scene…but it is in concert and collaboration with the audience and in conversation with the audience. (54)

One of the conceits of many immersive performances, including *TSF*, is that

individuals will encounter unknown worlds and have experiences in unfamiliar territory

that unfold over time. As the character of the Cheshire Cat suggests in the *Alice in

Wonderland* story, the path individuals choose is not important if they do not know where

they are going; in that case, any road will take them there. Audiences may perceive that

their experiences in *TSF* occur as if by chance, as they are escorted—seemingly

arbitrarily—by a dancer from the waiting room, to enter "Kingsland Ward." However,

each of the fifteen paths has been designed and pre-planned so that while the road taken

may seem random, it nonetheless results in each individual's arriving at a suitable and

satisfactory "destination" or, more accurately, experience of the production. Many

audiences perceive, at the end of their seemingly random journey, that their experience of

the performance was customized, interactive, and intimate and the "correct" way to

experience the production. As Morris states, "We have 15 different audience members

every performance—and every one of them walks out thinking they saw a completely different show. And each one of them is right" (28).

In crafting the fifteen pathways, Third Rail understood that it would be effective for audience participants to have a role to play while navigating their created world and therefore chose to situate the audience members in *TSF* by casting them as individual versions of Alice.[47] While there are dancers who portray Alice in the production, Willett explains that she, Morris, and Pearson "wanted each audience member to have an Alice-like experience, one where they could be absorbed into the world and lose sight of its edges and where they could find themselves often alone with the characters" (Willett quoted in Greenberg 2013). By casting the audience as Alice—someone who must navigate unknown territory and negotiate unfamiliar rules and structures—Third Rail establishes the audience participants as protagonists during the performance and, in so doing, acknowledges the desire for audiences to feel they have some agency in shaping the narrative and dynamic arcs along their journey. Morris explains: "When we started making this work, we knew that it wanted to be really, truly for the audience…and for each and every one of them. That, you know, totally baked my theater director/classical director noodle to be like, 'OK, so the protagonist is the audience.' Great. We were trying

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[47] Josephine Machon has written that immersive practices prioritize situating audiences as protagonists; she states that audiences shift roles between "that of witness, an associate, a client, a guest, a co-producer and a protagonist" (2013, 73). In addition, she has described the importance of created other worlds in immersive performance, noting that audiences are "physically surrounded by another world.…You are in a different world that has its own rules, that is intimate, epic. You are upright, active, engaged in action with the artist with whom you share the space" (55).

to figure out what the hell we were trying to make and it became very clear that the most important person was always the audience" (2014, 37).

While setting up the audience as protagonists, Third Rail also sets them up to be the scene partners for each of the characters they encounter. Here it is possible to conceptualize the audience as analogous to Alice, whose intuition guided her as her curiosity led her deeper and deeper into Wonderland. While audiences may be called upon to use intuition when engaging with the characters they meet, they are, in fact, participating in choreography that has been carefully structured by Third Rail. Pearson suggests, "Because [*TSF* is] so intimate, everything is always new—both a blessing and a curse. Every audience member has the potential to respond in a new way, and each scene can be a real collaboration to some extent. That's exciting, but it also means you have to train differently and be prepared for a wide palette of responses. It also means the structure you are working in must be very clearly defined and solid so your performance is supported. Structure is everything" (Pearson quoted in Rose 2013).

Pearson's statement underscores the idea that Third Rail understood the need to innovate a structure through which audiences could bridge the split described by Siegmund. Concerned that their audiences could be lost in the venue or unable to make sense of narratives within performance, they designed a structure whereby audiences could consent to be scene partners and understand their positions as protagonists. The resulting action framework guides audiences schematically through performances and offers opportunities to connect intuitively with the dancers, other audience participants,

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and the scenography in ways that enhance their immersion in the production. The nature

of the action framework will emerge more clearly as I describe the process of its creation.

The first venue in which *TSF* was created was the Greenpoint Hospital at 2

Kingsland Avenue in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York. Greenpoint had been closed

for thirty years before it was taken over by Arts@Renaissance, part of St. Nicks Alliance,

a North Brooklyn community group that converted the unused space into an arts venue.[48]

TSF was the creation of a new world, a closed environment in which Morris, Pearson,

and Willett could establish an efficient structure that alternated moments of audiences'

being engaged within the action framework with circumstances in which the audience

had more freedom to explore the space (sometimes referred to as "free range"). Willett

describes the opportunity to set the project at the hospital as the "miracle last layer"

(Willett quoted in Simon 2012), explaining, "We were working on *Then She Fell* for over

a year and a half when we were offered the space at Arts@Renaissance in what was

formerly the Greenpoint Hospital. The hospital ward was the final layer that tied

everything together, creating the world that our characters would live in" (Willett quoted

in Greenberg 2013).

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[48] Chris Henderson, program director for Arts@Renaissance, recounts, "Zach [Morris] was one of the first artists who I invited to see the space….He was literally dancing through the space when he first saw it" (Henderson quoted in Simon 2012). Founded by the St. Nicks Alliance in 2010, Arts@Renaissance is an arts program in North Brooklyn that connects artists with communities in the neighborhood through creative initiatives such as performances, workshops, and collaborative projects. As of July 2015, A@R no longer uses the 2 Kingsland Avenue space, because of the costs of overhead and maintenance (Arts Renaissance 2014).

Morris, Pearson, and Willett set up in the former outpatient wing of the hospital, creating twenty-two meticulously designed rooms that juxtaposed the fantastic worlds of Carroll's writings with the sterility of a psychiatric ward. The Victoriana/Steampunk decor of *TSF* suggests the accoutrements and belongings of Lewis Carroll/Charles Dodgson and Alice/Alice Liddell and her family, while nurses—who sometimes serve as silent observers and other times as watchful chaperones—intensify the atmosphere of the ward as contained and disciplined. With *TSF*'s Wonderland situated in the despairing confines of the psychiatric ward, everything and everyone—including the audience— seem to exist within realities that can seem uncanny and surreal.

For Third Rail, limiting the number of audience participants was a useful tactic. According to Willett, "It took years to figure out exactly how to craft this intimate experience, and the magic number that made it possible for the work we wanted to make turned out to be fifteen" (Willett quoted in Greenberg 2013). The smaller audience size initiated new levels of inquiry among the artistic directors regarding how to best design interactions that could be perceived by audiences as intimate. As elucidated by Pearson, "With *Then She Fell* the next step in that conversation was, 'How do we achieve a level of intimacy throughout and have the entire experience feel like the audience both has agency and their experiences is being curated?' So that was our big drive going in. What do we have to say that's new in terms of an audience model? It may not be the best business model, but in terms of an audience model we really wanted to keep space for the audience…for them to be able to see themselves in it" (Pearson 2014, 21). Pearson acknowledges that establishing fifteen as the magic number was a process of considering

many factors when setting *TSF* for the first time at Greenpoint Hospital. He says, "It's an algorithm…how many rooms, how many performers, how many audience members. Fifteen unlocked it for us and made it work" (Pearson quoted in Simon 2012). By limiting entry to fifteen audience members, Willett states, Third Rail has created a production wherein "the audience believes that the performers are not performers. The only way it works is when [audience members] forget that they are in a performance" (Willett 2014, 17). Audiences can do this because Third Rail has so expertly crafted the conditions for intuitive engagement through the tightly choreographed action framework.

Each of the fifteen pathways introduces the audience to content via different mediums and situations that were designed to be perceived by audiences as singular, personalized journeys. For example, the content of a particular scene could be primarily communicated to audiences through choreography, speech, task-based action, or the opportunity for audiences to explore the scenography on their own, as well as any combination of these strategies.[49] Scenes vary in duration yet each scene exists as a

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[49] The term *task-based actions* is derived from task-based theater, which has its origins in ritual, following the research of anthropologist Victor Turner. Task-based theater emerged through the explorations of choreographers and performance artists in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. Choreographers most associated with task-based action are Anna Halprin, who "developed the concept of task movement, in which dancers repeated a simple task over and over again in order to focus upon kinesthetic responses," and later by Yvonne Rainer, who studied with Halprin. Task-based actions can be accomplished within performance by performers or audiences and are often durational and worklike in nature, as in carrying out such tasks as chopping wood, making tea, and carrying objects from one place to another (for information on Anna Halprin related to task-based movement, see Anna Halprin Digital Archive, Anna Halprin Papers at the Museum of Performance and Design, San Francisco, https://annahalprindigitalarchive.omeka.net/biography).

distinct opportunity for audiences to discover narrative and thematic content through multiple mediums in order to learn more about and better interpret the world in which they are immersed. For example, a dancer can speak one on one directly with an audience member and draw that person into the completion of tasks, both of which events operate to focus audience attention and potentially diminish personal inhibition and distance from the scene. In this way, the character-driven choreography and the way the performers use movement and speech to prompt the audience's "intuitive" engagement are key pieces of the action framework alongside the scenography and dramaturgy. I refer to these aspects of the action framework as *movement and speech proposals*.

The character-driven choreography is always present, since it is, as Willett explains, "the language [of] the performers" (2014, 41). Movement and speech proposals are then specific to certain scenes and characters. The movement and speech proposals are intended to solicit task-based and improvisational responses, such as offering a tangerine to be peeled or requesting that an audience member take dictation for a letter. Moreover, there is choreography performed by dancers that is intended to be a movement proposal through which dancers can transition audience members through space. Examples include transitions within a room, namely, getting an audience member to move from standing

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Jonathan Pitches and colleagues refer to the concept of task-based instructions, which are intended to "generate physical responses or 'performances' from audiences" (Pitches et al. 2011, 150). In the immersive performances I have experienced, task-based actions and instructions include the use of verbal or nonverbal instructions or cues (such as making eye contact or gesturing) to activate audience participants toward completing or fulfilling specific actions during performance. For example, an audience member may be cued to pick up an object and instructed to accomplish a task with the object, or cued nonverbally via a performer's body language to travel through the space of the performance venue to give the object to another performer or audience member.

position to sitting in a chair, and through the performance space via choreographed pathways through doors, down corridors, or up and down staircases to different floors.

These proposals reflect task-based theater and include pedestrian actions, such as sitting in a chair. An overarching concept during the performance of character-driven choreography and movement and speech proposals is the "authenticity" of performance. Third Rail deploys aspects of task-based theater within the action framework in order to present *TSF* as a world that seamlessly blends reality and fantasy. The concept of authenticity helps to support the idea that each action—whether it is task-based or virtuosic dance—belongs fully within the world and thus nothing that happens in the world will be perceived by the audience to be jarring or to take them out of the immersed experience. Third Rail does not intend for dancers to emote as characters; rather, dancers are directed to authenticate their characters by inhabiting the *TSF* world as fully as possible via their precise performances of the choreography. Willett illuminates Third Rail's prioritization of authenticity of movement over expression of emotion:

> I feel like we're often trying to make choreography not feel like choreography. We look at every little moment, and we're like, "Oh, that thing feels like choreography, because I don't know why you're doing it." But if it comes from a task or it comes from something you're trying to accomplish as the character, it suddenly stops being choreography. I think it's coming back to Zach's perspective on task-based theater.…We don't try to emote.…Everything is task based in the choreography. We have had enough time to eliminate emotion. That sounds awful, but it's not, *[laughter]* actually. We've made the choreography so functional that the conceit of each scene is so clear that it's repeatable. What we figured out is that…we could achieve all of those emotions and have it read from the outside…from a very mechanical standpoint of just physicality…by really distilling each thing down. We don't try to add anything. We do the tasks of our characters, and by doing them that's what makes us our characters, because that's what they do. I think that helps to give us reasons to move because they're coming from a point of doing a task rather than doing a [dance] step. I think it's a

real fine line. We're still grappling [with] understanding what it means. (Willett 2014, 48)

Task-based actions are a part of the distinct choreographic language of each character, all of whom were developed through dramaturgical and movement research as well as consideration of the ways in which characters would engage with the scenography and relate to audiences. In an interview with Siobhan Burke of the *New York Times*, Morris stated:

> We were looking at all of the characters as emanations of this Lewis Carroll-Alice Liddell relationship, as they manifested in the texts.…All of these characters might be aspects of Lewis Carroll, or aspects of Alice Liddell, so we found a spectrum that we were operating in, in terms of movement qualities. There are characters who are decidedly vertical, whose carriage and movement vocabulary are born out of a Victorian formality. That's true of the White Rabbit and Red Queen [fig. 7]. Then on the flip side, there's this unfettered fluidness that is true of the Mad Hatter and White Queen.…There are things that our characters will always do and will never do. (Morris quoted in Burke 2013)

Figure 7. Tom Pearson and Rebekah Morin in *Then She Fell*. Tom Pearson (White Rabbit) and Rebekah Morin (Red Queen) in Third Rail Project's *Then She Fell* (New York, 2012–). Photograph by Rick Ochoa.

The two venues in which *TSF* was built and refined (Greenpoint Hospital and later St. John's at Kingsland Ward) affected the characters and their movement languages by presenting new spatial challenges, and this required making decisions regarding how dancers should move through the newly configured environment while remaining in character. Morris describes the importance of performing authentically as the character: "For me it's the ability to actually do what you're doing, to execute an action fully and with complete focus, whatever that is—whether it's an issue from the scapula or picking up a teacup…the ability to dance with architecture…the ability to do an action or do a sequence of actions uninflected" (Morris, Pearson, and Willett 2014, 28). Willett

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corroborates Morris's sentiment, offering an example: "The way that the [White Rabbit] happens to get from here to there is that he flips over the table, because that is just how he does it, not because he is suddenly launching into choreography" (Willett 2014, 40). Morris's and Willett's comments bring to light that space and scenography had a significant impact upon the two artists' processes of crafting the character-driven choreography. The artistic directors and dancers had to figure out how to move within the constructed world of *TSF* and craft exciting and believable trajectories for each character in relation to architecture and scenic design.

The character-driven choreography was developed through movement improvisation as a research tool in conjunction with theoretical and dramaturgical exploration of characters in Carroll's Alice stories. The result is a finely crafted amalgamation of virtuosic choreographic invention and pedestrian actions. The virtuosic choreography, encompassing technically challenging movements such as somersaulting over a table and sliding down the railing of a staircase, establishes the fantastical world, while the pedestrian movements, such as when a character lifts a cup full of tea from the table without embellishment and drinks it, reinforce perceptions of the world as "real."[50] Moreover, the movement creates a rich discourse between bodies, space, and scenography so that the result is an action framework that can be replicated performance

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[50] Josephine Machon states, "The immersive world should exist on its own terms.…The world operates both within and outside of the time-frame, rules and relationships of the 'everyday' world" (2013, 93). In *TSF*, for the audience to be successfully captured, it is necessary that they believe that they are situated—albeit temporarily, by suspending disbelief—in a wonderland that is real and the choreography is designed to accentuate that realness or authenticity (93).

after performance, further concretizing that the characters inhabit a world into which audiences have been invited (while also belying the fact that audience members experience it as interactive, an issue I return to in the final section of this chapter). By successfully performing the character-driven choreography, the dancers earn the attention and trust of the audience members in order to capture their imaginations and lead them into an alternative world that has its own rules and conventions—including choreography—to which audiences must adhere.

Capturing the Audience: Choreography's Function in the Action Framework

When audience participants arrive at St. John's at Kingsland Ward, the venue for *TSF*, they are ushered by a dancer performing the role of nurse into a space designed as a doctor's waiting room. Here they are registered individually and given customized cocktails fashioned to resemble medicine in small dosing cups. They are also given a set of keys and encouraged to explore the various locked boxes and filing cabinets present in the waiting room. In these boxes and cabinets, audiences find artifacts such as patient files, notes from doctors, photographs of Alice Liddell, and other ephemera intended to assist audiences in interpreting the narrative content by foreshadowing characters, themes, and relationships to be revealed later through the choreography. The handing over of the keys suggests that the dancers trust the audience members, and in turn, the audience begins to develop trust in the dancers and in the constructed environment of *TSF*.

After the audience members have some time to explore the room, they are greeted by a dancer performing the role of doctor, who welcomes them and presents two simple

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instructions: "Do not speak unless spoken to, and do not open any closed doors." These two instructions provide a set of rules to guide behavior and are intended to encourage the attentiveness and cooperation of the audience. They also introduce the audience to the ways in which the movement and speech proposals of the action framework function in relation to scenographic and relational contexts. For example, the directive "Do not speak unless spoken to" communicates what is expected in terms of verbal communication and frames relational possibilities of audience members. The instruction not to "open any closed doors" frames the audience participants' actions, including their interactivity with scenography (*not* opening any closed doors). After the directives are established, the audience members are approached by a nurse—or by a dancer in character, as the Hatter approached me in the scenario described earlier—and guided into one of the fifteen pathways through the performance. Thus, audiences enter willingly into the choreographed action framework in order to discover the characters inhabiting the Wonderland of *TSF*. The complexity and depth of *TSF* as a production results from the ways in which the artistic directors have interwoven and overlapped different movement and speech proposals across each of the fifteen pathways.

Third Rail's reimagining of the iconic tea party from Carroll's story is an instance of character-driven choreography that delivers dance-specific content about the characters and their relationship to one another while simultaneously offering movement proposals to which the audience can respond. Dancer Rebekah Morin, who originated the role of the Red Queen, describes the specific choreography of the tea party and her experiences of watching audiences respond: "The tea party has this really sort of silly, complicated

choreography where we're stacking cups and spoons, and it's all precise and in unison, and it happens three times in the scene. That [is] the Hatter's job in that scene…[to] figure out which person looks like they want to do it, and give them a little nod and keep eye contact while you start, and if you can just pull them into that first moment they might keep going without thinking about it too hard. You get them to come with you before they worry about it" (Morin 2014, 41).

Audience member Micah Edwards, a self-described aficionado of all things *Alice in Wonderland* who has seen six performances of *TSF*, understands the tea party choreography as twofold process that signals the status of characters and their relationships to one another while coaxing engagement from audiences:

> I love the order of the entrance, because I think it defines—the entire show can be summed up in the tea party. The Rabbit is first…followed by Hatter. It starts out with the fight between [them]…between the Hatter and the White Rabbit. The two of them vying for control…which is a very parallel fight…a fight between equals. It's all very give and take. The table goes back and forth…the hat is on and off. Then the White Queen enters…and she comes in gracefully and quietly, whereas when the Red Queen enters there's a change in the music—the Hatter and Rabbit are pulling the chairs out…so she walks across the chairs to get to the table…so she never touches the floor. Then the queens, of course, facing off…and they bring in more audience members to watch as this goes along.…The audience members are the pawns. It's the marshaling of a chess game. It's the setup of the pieces. You have the power pieces making their play. The characters have an extremely complex ritual…which you're never told to follow…but I've never seen a show where people didn't try to follow along. You have a chance to improvise throughout. You know that [the characters] are watching you and they're watching you screw up and they know it. They know how to do it. It's a point where other people know the rules and you don't. (M. Edwards 2014, 42)

This scene offers an example of the casting of audience-as-Alice, themes of one's being lost in a world with rules one doesn't know or comprehend yet confronted by individuals whose behavior is curious and alluring. Another audience member, Willow Edwards,

who is married to Micah and also attended six performances of *TSF*, describes a dancer's use of eye contact to engage the audience and prompt a movement response: "I remember catching [a dancer's] eye and them—sort of in the middle of their own performance and doing the choreography themselves—smiling and nodding at me like, 'Yes, please continue to'—like there was this clear indication from them that, 'Yes, we want you to participate in this. Please continue doing this'" (W. Edwards 2014, 44).

By responding to movement proposals from dancers, audience members who participate in the tea party are captured by the choreography, which embeds them deeper within the action framework and immerses them further in the performance. Morris's reflection on the impact of the tea party scene includes an assessment of audience responses as an attempt to insert themselves into the action. He comments, "I think that maybe…in some cases, audience members are literally viscerally experiencing what's happening.…They are having an embodied experience of what's happening…[that] is exciting to me because it is an alternate way of understanding" (Morris 2014, 33). The tea party is one instance of how the action framework captures the audience and leads them to engagement. Participation in the tea party—especially when performing the choreography of the cups and saucers—allows audiences to gain a bodily sense of the physical logic of the *TSF* world, which then contributes to processes of interpretation and meaning making.

The functioning of the action framework in the tea party scene and others to be discussed below can productively be understood through Ric Allsopp and André Lepecki's theory of choreography as "an apparatus of capture" (2008, 3). Drawing upon

the concept of "apparatus of capture," originated by philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari, Allsopp and Lepecki assert, "Choreography was invented in order to structure a system of command to which bodies have to subject themselves (freely, as Althusser would say!) into the system's wills and whims. Thus, choreography also names a very corporeal need: the need to pedagogically and biologically (re) produce bodies capable of carrying out certain movement imperatives" (3). Allsopp and Lepecki analyze choreography's ontology separate from "all sorts of aesthetic, stylistic, historical, or technical concerns," to understand the power and control choreography can assert over bodies, following Michel Foucault's theory of "docile bodies" (3). The action framework of *TSF* approximates Allsopp and Lepecki's theory of choreography as an apparatus of capture in two distinct ways. First, following Allsopp and Lepecki, the bodies of the dancers in *TSF* are "captured" through the choreography so they can perform "precise enactment of positions, attitudes, steps, gestures, but also words, all for the sake of exact repetition" in order to "carry out the movement imperatives of the production" (3). This is accomplished through Third Rail's creation of character-driven choreography, by which I mean the movement vocabulary and qualities unique to each character performed by the dancers.

The second way that the action framework functions as an apparatus of capture is through the movement and speech proposals offered by dancers to audiences, as described previously. Contained in the scenario described at the beginning of this chapter in which I first met the Hatter are examples of the two ways in which the action framework operates as an apparatus of capture. Everything about my encounter with the

Hatter was choreographed as proposals to which I needed to respond. The Hatter's statement that I "came highly recommended," was a speech proposal that surprised and disoriented me even as it implicated me relationally within the scene; I did not know for what I had been recommended, or by whom. This speech proposal was followed by a series of movement proposals—Carena's precise eye contact, commanding gestures, augmented physicality, and modulation of the proxemics of the space by diminishing and expanding the distances between us—all choreographed to influence my understanding of her and my environs. My captivation with Carena's performance of the carefully crafted movement and speech proposals lured me into a state of heightened curiosity, which in turn prompted me to willingly respond. I surrendered to Carena's skillful execution of the Hatter's choreography, accepting the relational context in which she established me as her secretary.

As the Hatter removed objects—the inkwell, fountain pen, and paper—from their locations within the room and presented them to me with instructions to use them for her benefit, I intuited that there was a place for me in this constructed world and that my presence and participation was not only requested but desired. I perceived my responses to her proposals as appropriate and natural and part of the process of my trying to understand and meet expectations of this character with whom I was sharing this moment. I was hooked into the scene through the choreography, engaged through action in the Hatter's atelier, and then released back into the choreographed world of *TSF*. Carena, having performed the choreography of the Hatter over 533 times since 2011, has had opportunities to "look into the eyes of literally thousands of audience members"

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(Carena 2014), and thus, I am not surprised I was captured by her thoroughly refined and articulated performance of the choreography. The pile of discarded letters in the corner of the Hatter's atelier is evidence that many audience members, in addition to me, have been caught by the Hatter's performance. While the Hatter's choreography lays perpetually in wait as a trap to ensnare the next visitor, it is designed by Third Rail to be implemented by the dancers via benevolent practices of "catch and release."[51] While temporarily captured in each scene through their responses to the movement and speech proposals, audiences are nonetheless always released back into the *TSF* world. Through these catch-and-release practices, Third Rail is able to preserve the curiosity of the audience and their trust of the dancers for the duration of the performance.

Allsopp and Lepecki assert that the "capture" of the dancer by the choreographer is the standard and most common relational dynamic between the two entities. The dancer submits to the command of the choreographer to perform the choreography as directed. Allsopp and Lepecki are discussing choreography in traditional presentation contexts in which audiences experience choreography as an apparatus of capture over dancers during performance. Thus, Allsopp and Lepecki do not identify audiences as captured in the same way as they suggest dancers are captured. In the case of *TSF*, the artistic directors have captured the dancers through the choreography and, through this choreography, deploy them to present the action framework to the audiences. Because *TSF*'s choreography as an apparatus of capture is mediated through the dancers, it does not fully

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[51] As Pearson explains, dancers are instructed to "be in that scene with [the audience participant]…[and] just talk to them. And if it's funny you laugh. And if it's disturbing—take care of them and honor their choices, but listen" (Pearson 2014, 34).

control the audience members, since they are not captured in the same ways as the dancers. Rather, they are invited into the world, offered possibilities, and tempted with proposals. The possibility for indeterminacy does exist between the dancers' proposals and audience responses in the action framework—audiences make choices and the dancers must wait to receive the response before responding themselves or making another proposal in return. That said, the audiences are nonetheless captured by the choreography, because while they are invited in and tempted with proposals, Third Rail delimits the range of possibilities for audience responses through the action framework. Even so, the fact that the majority of audiences willingly respond to these proposals speaks to the desire they have to enter the world as active participants, regardless of the parameters for participation.

Through their performance of the character-driven choreography the dancers offer precisely crafted movement or speech proposals to the audience with the intention of eliciting movement or speech responses in return. Individual dancers often, but not exclusively, perform the movement and speech proposals in a one-on-one relational context with an audience participant. The proposals usually incorporate scenographic elements and props to facilitate interaction between dancers and audience participants. Through their design of the proposals, the artistic directors have provided pathways along which audiences can shed their position as passive observers and become part of the action of the performance space. The artistic directors' objective to include and immerse audiences as scene partners in the content and context of *TSF* as a reimagined

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Wonderland is fulfilled when the audience responds to and is captured by the choreographed action framework.

The artistic directors learned that how the dancers perform the proposals is critical to facilitating the audience's responses within the action framework. The choreography of the action framework must to be performed with specificity and precision in order for audience participants to respond to the movement proposals in ways that can be perceived as intuitively and natural—ways that feel authentic in the context of the *TFS* world. Because Third Rail committed themselves to learning "how to choreograph transitions and get people to follow you without having to hold their hands or touch them in any way," countless hours were spent on crafting the movement and speech proposals (Willett 2014, 41). Rigorous rehearsals allowed Third Rail to determine the specificity of timing and the spatial accuracy required to present objects to audience members in such a way that they accept them, and to efficiently move audiences from location to location throughout the venue. Willett describes the research conducted to figure out how to get two audience members—who are often strangers to one another—to climb into a small bed together to listen to a bedtime story delivered by the White Queen:

> That scene took so long to figure out in the test audiences…how to get people to go in the bed. Often if [audience members] don't know each other, they don't want to lie down in the bed. [Or] people would get themselves in really awkward positions, I would just say, "Are you comfortable? Because it's a long story." I'd have people sitting with their heads on the bedrail…and they're trying to hold it for six minutes, and it was painful to watch this poor person suffering so badly because they don't want to break the scene. And then I found that fluffing the pillows is a huge cue. I would fluff those pillows and…people would go right in. (Willett 2014, 46)

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Willett's choreographed fluffing of the pillows is a movement proposal found through improvisation to solve the creative problem of audience discomfort. The quotes from Willett and from Pearson, earlier, speak to how specifically the dancers' bodies and actions must be choreographed to elicit the preferred "intuitive" responses from the bodies of audience members, thus facilitating an optimal experience of interactivity, intimacy, and immersion. To accomplish their task, they are using tools from dance—choreography, improvisation, and observational skills honed through years of watching bodies in motion to best guide audiences through the action framework of the performance. Third Rail refines its choreographed movement proposals by carefully observing audience members and their responses within the action framework to assess the responses so as to refine the proposals for future performances. Third Rail edits and amends the choreography continuously so it is as clear as possible, understanding that slight choreographic differences in movement proposals can solicit myriad improvisational movement responses from audiences.

The White Rabbit

I hurry down the corridor trying to catch up to a man sharply dressed in a white suit. I had been enjoying a tea party when he had whispered in my ear that we were late. At the end of the corridor, he pushes opens a door, and I am barely over the threshold when he pushes the door closed quietly and tightly behind me. I get a quick glimpse of the space, which contains a table situated between two chairs alongside a wall lined with filing cabinets. The man makes eye contact with me, places his fingers on the chair closest to him, slides it away from the table, and sits down. I sit down in the other chair,

now face to face with him across the table. Never taking his eyes off me, his thrusts his

right arm back behind him to slide open a drawer of a filing cabinet. From it, he takes

two white roses and places one in front of me and one in front of himself. With his left

arm, he reaches behind to retrieve two small paintbrushes from another drawer. Again,

he places one in front of me and one in front of himself. From a third drawer, he

produces a small pot of red paint, which he promptly opens and places between the two

of us in the center of the table. He picks up the paintbrush closest to him and pauses. I

pick up the paintbrush closest to me. An infinitesimal smile plays at the corner of his

mouth as he dips his brush in the pot of paint and then pauses again. I dip my paintbrush

in the pot. Lifting his white rose from the table, he begins to paint it red, alternating his

gaze between his work on the rose and me. I begin to paint my rose as well. As soon as I

touch my brush to the soft white petal, I am enchanted with this task and quickly swept up

in my determination to cover the entire blossom with paint.

I was absorbed and consumed with my task of painting the rose in this scene, with

Tom Pearson performing the White Rabbit the Friday evening I attended. Pearson, who

originated the role of the White Rabbit, reflects on that scene: "All of those times, you

know, however many roses have been painted—I don't think I've ever had anyone do it

the same.…That scene has never been exactly the same. I think that's one of the most

beautiful things about this.…People go to it in really different ways" (Pearson 2014, 11).

At the end of a long week of work, I was charmed by the simplicity of what was

expected of me—all I was being asked to do was to choose whether or not to paint this

rose (fig. 8). The choreography of this scene, including Pearson's hand gesture on the

chair and the acts of sliding it out and sitting down, are his movement proposals to audience members. The proposals are choreographed to settle audiences in the scene so they consent to pick up the paintbrush laid out for them and paint the rose. As we sat in silence together and painted our roses, I perceived the two of us engaged in a moment of complicit intimacy during which I had agency to curate my own experience. I didn't have to return the White Rabbit's eye contact if I didn't want to—I could simply focus on my task of painting the rose he had given me. Nor was I obligated to watch him when he stopped painting his rose and moved into choreography during which he circled pathways around me seated at the table. The energy of the scene was calm, even tinged with a sense of domesticity, and it seemed appropriate that I should continue with my task as he moved on to a different kind of labor with his dancing. Through the White Rabbit's movement proposals, I was allowed me to improvise and exercise some volitional behavior through my own responses, albeit within carefully designed parameters.

Figure 8. Carlton Cyrus Ward in *Then She Fell*. Carlton Cyrus Ward (White Rabbit) in Third Rail Project's *Then She Fell* (New York, 2012–). Photograph by Adam Jason Photography.

Alice, Bathing

A nurse leads me to a door and instructs me to enter. I step into a large space in which the floor, walls, and ceiling are covered in green tiles. As I scan the room, I see it is empty except for a half-naked young woman in a skirt, sitting on a stool along one wall with her back exposed. The nurse has withdrawn behind me and I am left to watch the woman as she takes a sponge out of a bucket on the floor in her right hand and holds it over her left shoulder, dripping water down her back. She continues to bathe, gliding the sponge around her neck as her other arm carves pathways in the space around her. She holds the sponge over the bucket then allows it to sink silently into the water as she threads her arms through an undershirt that encircles her waist. No longer half

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unclothed, she stands and turns to face me. She moves toward me as if in a dream state,

barely held down by gravity while sustaining her gaze on me. She brushes my arm very

slightly as she passes me and I turn to see her approach a series of small dressing rooms

without doors. She gestures with her hand toward one room and steps into the one

adjacent to it so I can no longer see her. After a moment, I hear her voice; she asks me to

hand her the crinoline hanging in the dressing room she first gestured toward. As I step

in to retrieve it, she speaks again. "Have you ever been in love?" she asks. I pass the

crinoline around the corner as I reply, "Yes." There is silence. She cranes her head

around the edge of the partition that separates us and looks me in the eye. Her quizzical

expression suggests to me that she is deciding whether I answered honestly. But then she

breaks into a smile and quickly retreats behind the partition. "Hand me my blouse," she

says. I find the blouse hanging on a peg in my little room and pass it around the partition.

"Is it better to do what you want or what you are told?" she asks. My answer prompts

her to laugh and the sound drifts over the top of the partition and echoes off the tiles of

the washroom.

During the first *TSF* performance I attended, Marissa Nielsen-Pincus compellingly

performed Alice as a curious adolescent who knows something of the world but is not

convinced that what she knows—or is being told—is true. As we stood in adjacent

bathroom stalls unable to see one another, she posed questions to me about love and

breaking the rules in order to get a sense of my trustworthiness and sincerity rather than

to gather my answers (fig. 9). Nielsen-Pincus is partially naked when the audience walks

in on her in this scene, and vulnerability and privacy are the subtexts here. As Nielsen-

Pincus puts it, "The idea of bathing had gotten thrown around a lot. We played with bathing and then the questions, and then we played with bathing, dressing, and then going into the questions. We slowly broke it down to, OK, we need this level of intimacy to make this level of intimacy work. You have to earn intimacy with the bathing. People are a little bit taken aback and they lose themselves and they just answer without thinking" (Nielsen-Pincus 2014, 20).

Figure 9. Tara O'Con and Marissa Nielsen-Pincus in *Then She Fell*. Tara O'Con and Marissa Nielsen-Pincus (Alice) in Third Rail Project's *Then She Fell* (New York, 2012–). Photograph by Adam Jason Photography.

By staging an obfuscation of Alice—her body hidden while still communicating—the artistic directors' efficacious partnering of speech and movement proposals created an environment of exchange during which I responded with uninhibited and unfettered answers. The scene was both compelling and disorienting for the ways in which I was responding verbally and to the tasks in present time while thinking in past time, especially when being asked to recall the memory of a first love. When Nielsen-Pincus as Alice posed the question "Is it better to do what you want or to do what you are told?" I was again temporally shifted, as I considered the implications of my answer in present and future circumstances. Here we see the efficaciousness of the action framework, as it operates at full capacity when multiple proposals are presented swiftly and successively to audiences, capturing them fully in the moment. By densely layering and overlapping proposals, the artistic directors are able to solicit responses from audiences that feel intuitive and often uninhibited and yet are the responses the choreographers and performers are hoping for.

Artistic directors and performers noted that there are moments when proposals can fail to achieve their purpose, meaning the choreography does not capture the audience as intended. This is often because there has been "choreographic drift," common parlance for when the performance deviates from the original choreography. Pearson explains, describing a moment he experienced performing the White Rabbit:

> It gets so precise. And a lot of it is trial and error. You can do something over a hundred times and then all of a sudden—the other night, [audience members] didn't want to sit when I pulled the chair out. And I thought, "I'm doing something different, but I don't even realize I'm doing it. What have I changed? I'm pulling this chair out now and they won't sit. They always sit. What am I

doing?" *[Laughs]* It was really, really strange. I do that scene like four times a show, and [I've done it] a thousand times. I couldn't figure it out. And then I eventually figured it out. It was because I used two fingers instead of four. And that made all the difference. (Pearson 2014, 42)

Moments such as this are rare in *TSF*, as Third Rail engages in a systematic and thorough "auditing" of their performances; that is, artistic directors and rehearsal directors attend performances, both observing and participating, to assess the effectiveness of the action framework in engaging and capturing audiences.

Experiences of the Action Framework: Perceiving Interactivity and Intimacy

Nielsen-Pincus, in reflecting on her performances of Alice in the bathing scene, says, "I don't know if people are making up stories but I feel like people tell me the truth. And, often, [audience participants] give a lot more than they need to" (Nielsen-Pincus 2014, 27). By this, she means that audiences often reveal intimate personal details of their lives during the bathing scene, beyond the one- or two-word answers the questions would possibly provoke. In these situations, Nielsen-Pincus—who also serves as rehearsal director for the production—reminds herself and the dancers she directs "how important it is to honor the audience's choices" and respect their vulnerability in that moment (77). Once Nielsen-Pincus as Alice is fully dressed and steps out to face the audience member who is serving as her scene partner, she observes them in order to continue the scene: "One thing that I think about in that scene a lot is mirroring the audience's response. So, if they're giggly or find it funny, I go there as well…but if someone is more internal then I will stay that way myself" (24). Nielsen-Pincus, after observing her scene partner, deploys mirroring as a strategy to increase his or her comfort level, to foster interaction

and intimacy. Pearson, in discussing the performance of the bathing scene, explains how the concepts of intimacy and interaction are regarded as part of the design of the movement and speech proposals: "I think the key to an intimate moment working or not working is that sense that you earn it. You can't just assume intimacy with your audience. You have to earn that intimacy with your audience. In the way that that scene is constructed you know you're observing her. There's a little bit of vulnerability there on her part. Then there's a little bit of participatory stuff, but if she doesn't hear you…it doesn't ever progress to a point where you're going to give and then get back as much as you do in that scene" (Pearson 2014, 34).

Considering this quote from Pearson in conjunction with the descriptions of my own experiences as an audience member, it is possible to understand how audience perceptions of intimacy and interaction can emerge as outcomes of the action framework. Other audience members articulated similar perceptions when encountering Alice in the bathing scene, emphasizing their interest in and attraction to a dancer listening and responding to their questions. For example, a comment from Robyn Pring, an audience participant of *TSF* who has attended many immersive productions, reinforces perceptions of intimacy and interactions: "In my experiences in immersive theaters, they kind of do a monologue for you. They are doing a performance, but they're not necessarily reacting to the things that you're saying to them. So I thought that was very interesting [in *TSF*] and very engaging. So…the first time, I looked at her like, 'Am I supposed to answer?' and she nodded, and it's interesting because you're with a stranger, and a stranger that's in

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character in an intimate space talking about things that are deeply personal" (Pring 2014, 11).

In her description of the same scene, Willow Edwards had a similar expectation that a monologue would be delivered without opportunities for her to engage or respond:

> Alice is standing…in the stall, asking you to hand her things. So you're handing her the stuff that she's asking for…[and] then she asks you, "Have you ever been in love?" And the part of my brain that was sitting in sort of the backseat analyzing things immediately thought, "Oh, she's going to launch into the some monologue. Or she has an A and B monologue depending on how you answer." And so I answered the question. And then she asked me another question. And commented on my answers. It was startling because, "Oh, she's talking to me and I have to answer her." This is a conversation—not a scene as I would traditionally define that—it's a dialogue. I'm sure that they have set things that they throw in there…and ideas of, you know, sort of how to steer the conversation. But it's still a conversation. She still has to react to my answers no matter how absurd they may be. I thought it was really interesting. (W. Edwards 2014, 24)

Neither Robyn nor Willow was anticipating a conversation with direct exchange and yet their statements suggest they both perceived that a conversation had happened. Willow's description highlights the ways in which proposals are delivered via one medium (speech proposal asking for an object) yet solicit a response via another medium (movement response of finding objects and passing them over). As is clear from Pring's and Willow's statements, the layering of movement and speech proposals with different intentions seems particularly effective in supporting perceptions of interactivity and intimacy.

Quotes from two critics who reviewed *TSF* further elucidate the ways in which audiences perceive themselves interacting with dancers during performance. First, Ben Brantley, *New York Times* theater critic, describes experiencing *TSF* in a childlike state:

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"The Red Queen (for that is her name; she is played by Rebekah Morin) handed me a cordial. Though it came from a medicine bottle, and was the fourth libation I had been offered that evening, I accepted it. It seemed the proper thing to do, and I didn't want to offend her.…Grown-ups are so perplexing, aren't they?...For much of the hazy two hours I spent wandering through rooms there, I felt like a bewildered but enchanted child, made privy to the arcana of another, darker world. That does not mean that I felt innocent" (Brantley 2012; see fig. 10).

Figure 10. Rebekah Morin in *Then She Fell*. Rebekah Morin (Red Queen) in Third Rail Project's *Then She Fell* (New York, 2012–). Photograph by Adam Jason Photography.

Second, Sarah Taylor Ellis, writing for *Stage and Cinema*, suggests she gained an understanding of role and responsibility through *TSF*'s structure and the performances of

the dancers: "The manipulation of perspective and the use of space is ever imaginative, and the intimate (and often one-on-one) scenes are wondrous. Locking eyes with the actors and organically coming to an understanding of my purpose in each scene was one of the most magical pleasures of the show" (Ellis 2013).

The comments of Brantley and Ellis suggest they understood their positionality within the performance; they understood that they had roles to enact, and that in those roles, they would be required to provide responses of one sort or another to the proposals offered by the dancers. Brantley's description of himself, in particular, as a "bewildered but enchanted child," suggests he accepted his status as beholden to the dancers he encountered, and thus he obliged them by acting intuitively within the action framework. When audience participants lock eyes with the dancers and feel they have been seen, they can perceive of themselves as having taken up meaningful positions and purposes within the *TSF* world. Because audiences feel comfortable within the action framework— meaning they sense that space has been made within the action framework for their presence—they, in return, provide responses that seem to be generated intuitively. It is through their intuitive responses that they abide by and become components of the choreography as an apparatus of capture.

To extrapolate from the quotes from Pring, Edwards, Brantley, and Ellis, audience participants and critics perceive *TSF* as intimate and interactive. With my scenarios attesting that I myself perceived intimacy and interactivity, it is critical to analyze how and why these affective responses are emerging from experiences of *TSF*. My argument that the action framework in *TSF* functions as an apparatus of capture may seem

paradoxical given the audience participants' expressions of perceived intimacy and interactivity. However, I suggest it is the paradoxical nature of immersive performance to provide audiences with a sense of control over their exchanges with dancers—which they may perceive as intimate and interactive, an affective response among many others—while actually controlling audience members' experiences by guiding them through carefully designed structures. Indeed, in the case of *TSF*, audiences would likely not experience performances as intimate and interactive if the action framework were not so carefully structured and performed with precision by trained dancers.

Yet what is the nature of interactivity? When audiences follow the action framework and engage intuitively within it, are they augmenting and enhancing their experiences within the performance? Alternatively, when an audience member provides a response that differs from what might be expected, are they restricting their ability to experience the performance as it has been planned and created expressly for their enjoyment? New media scholar Catherine Bouko proposes that interactivity is "a rare mechanism among immersive performance" (2014, 264) and questions whether interactivity can even be discussed "if the whole device has been prearranged" (255). Bouko's queries highlight the concerns of many scholars and theorists, including myself, who question notions of freedom and the nature of interactivity for participants of immersive performance. She remarks, "It is therefore more important to work with the limits of interactivity, and to explore the tension between the pre-established dramaturgy and the place left for the participant, than to get over-enthusiastic about the freedom offered to the participant and the beneficial effects of such practices" (259).

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I argue that through the design and implementation of the action framework, Third Rail does exactly what Bouko suggests: they work within the theatrical limits of interactivity and make space for the participant. The action framework allows the audience to exist—if only momentarily—outside the Western theatrical split and affords audience members opportunities to perceive agency by assuming roles as scene partners who interact with the dancers. Furthermore, audience members are able to understand themselves as protagonists of their own narratives in *TSF* because they understand their responses to the movement and speech proposals as evidence of interactivity with the dancers.

Although the action framework as an apparatus of capture may seem controlling, Third Rail manages its implementation so audiences feel engaged in processes of discovery in Wonderland and perceive their encounters as intimate and interactive. The artistic directors do not intend for audiences to work as hard as the dancers (that is, to be completely under the control of the choreography), nor do they want audiences to get lost within the performance space or be unable to follow (or construct) a narrative. I suggest that Third Rail crafted the action framework, with great effort and care, as a bridge for audiences; it is a bridge built with the intention of spanning the historical gap that has traditionally positioned the audience as passive and the performer as active. The action framework serves as a bridge over which audiences can cross from their entrenched positions and perceptions as passive receivers of live performance into other ways of being in live performance.

If audience members resist the action framework, they slip outside the apparatus of capture that is the choreography of *TSF.* By evading the apparatus of capture, audiences lose access to the bridge created by the action framework and thus lose the opportunity to cross over to be something other than audience, to be scene partners and perceive themselves as protagonists of their own journeys. While these audience members may slip outside the action framework, they can never completely slip outside, or escape, their position as audience. By slipping out of the apparatus of capture, they are inevitably situated back into their historical, traditionally passive audience position.[52] For most audiences, the desire for interactivity is very real, and to fulfill this desire, they are compelled to acquiesce in the action framework as an apparatus of capture. While Bouko cautions against the "myth of interactivity," I assert that it is important to acknowledge that audiences desire interactive and intimate exchanges during immersive performance *and* that they describe themselves as having experienced interactivity and intimacy during performances (Bouko 2014, 258).

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[52] It is important to note that when audiences "slip" outside the apparatus of capture, it does not impede the dancers' performances; nor do the slippages change *TSF* as a production. The dancers can carry on with their performance during moments of audience nonconsensus and indeterminacy because their roles have been so carefully designed and choreographed. Sometimes the slippages create moments of live performance that are perceived by the artistic directors and dancers as examples of the audiences' creative agency—moments that can be pleasurable and memorable for both dancers and audience members. Several of the artistic directors and dancers provided anecdotal descriptions of experiences in which audience members had slipped out of the apparatus of capture or presented a response that was surprisingly aberrant and sometimes charming. These events were memorable for the research participants for the ways in which they were anomalies, rather than the norm, and occurred less frequently than did instances of audiences' working within the action framework.

Throughout history, creators of live performance have developed numerous practices and forms aimed at bridging the performer-audience divide described by Siegmund earlier in this chapter. Immersive performance is another form that has emerged to address this divide, and within it, new practices are being developed, including the action framework I suggest Third Rail has created for *TSF*. However, none of these attempts can make the split between performer and audience disappear completely. The fact that the split exists and endure frames the discourse surrounding the ontology of interactivity and perpetuates questions about the possibility of interaction in live performance. Audience perceptions of interactivity are outcomes of the choreographed action framework, a strategy that assists Third Rail in presenting their interpretations of the *Alice* stories in ways that include audiences in the action of performance. Because the action framework is so precisely choreographed and structured, it succeeds in producing experiences that audiences express they perceive as interactive, perceptions that contribute to audiences understanding the performances as immersive. These perceptions of interaction reflect the deep desires of audiences who want to be a significant part of the performance. For me, the question of whether interactivity is ontologically real or not in *TSF* is irrelevant. What is relevant is that the artistic directors attempt to fulfill the desire of audiences for exchanges in live performance that feel intimate, interactive, and immersive through the creation of a choreographically operated action framework and that audiences experience *TSF* as such. The sustained creative efforts of Third Rail in crafting *TSF* speak to the strategies—which include dance—that they as artists who are willing to innovate in order to accommodate the desires of the audience.

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CHAPTER VI

THE ACTUATED AUDIENCE: INVESTIGATING DANCE AND

COAUTHORALITY IN BLUEMOUTH INC.'S *DANCE MARATHON*

Dear Dance Marathon,

Thank you. I know we only spent a few hours together but I wanted to let you know how wonderful you are. Despite my aching calves and mysterious bruise, I miss you. You were a joy to be with. The friends I made through you might not last a lifetime but, for that one, lovely night, they meant so much. You made a team of two from strangers; we laughed, we tried, and held on to each other.

At first I thought you were too good to be true and in a way I was right. Your trickery at first was subtle but once I realised the kindness in your lies I knew I had to forgive you. For some you made them feel inadequate; for others you gave them the courage to shine. And even though we floundered and fell, after knowing you for such a short time we all became champions. Even when our number was up we spurred each other on. Even when you stripped me of my purpose; an indignity which led me to the regrettable act of betraying my sister, still then, I fought on.

I saw so much through you. I witnessed amateurs evolve into experts. I saw kindness morph into competitiveness. I sensed strangers becoming friends and family turn into temporary enemies. You made me race to the finish line, flail in an attempt to regain my status, squish my sweaty body against an unknown other. And even though you may have

turned me into a loser, well, I forgive you. You showed me humility; the sigh of relief in

letting go of hopes of a trophy and cheering for our new, winning, friends.

So thank you Dance Marathon. Thank you for the fun, thank you for the music.

Thank you for the artistry, thank you for the effort; I'm sure you must be tired so please

go and take long and well deserved rest. But know that—If we meet again—I'm on to you.

And as I have already proved, I'm not above doing whatever it takes to leave our next

night together as your dancing queen.

Love and very, very sweaty hugs,

Your not-so-bitter Loser

This ardent, lovelorn missive was written by Bella Fortune, writer in residence for

Theatre Bristol, who participated in bluemouth inc.'s production of *Dance Marathon*

(*DM*) during its run at the Mayfest contemporary theater festival in Bristol, England, in

May 2015 (Fortune 2015).[53] Fortune, in describing her investment in the event, reveals

her enthusiasm for *DM* as a durational immersive performance based on the competitive

dance marathons popular in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. Bluemouth inc., an

award-winning collective based in Toronto, Canada, created *DM* in 2009 through the

national commissioning program of Toronto's Harbourfront Centre.[54] *DM* is bluemouth

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[53] Theatre Bristol is a collective of producers that, as an Arts Council England National
Portfolio Organization, works together with artists and producers to both commission and
produce new work and to develop national and international exchange opportunities in
the United Kingdom and elsewhere (see Theatre Bristol 2015.)
[54] Bluemouth inc. is now based both in Toronto and in Brooklyn, New York. Adams,
Simic, and Windeyer are Canadian, while O'Connell, Reeves, and Pettrow are American.

inc.'s most widely toured and commercially successful work to date, with over fifty

international performances involving more than seven thousand participants.[55]

While some audience members are aware of the interactive nature of *DM* in advance,

most discover only when they have arrived at the venue that by purchasing tickets, they

have registered as contestants in the marathon. Over the course of the next three hours,

audiences are given lessons in various dance styles and have the opportunity to practice

them as part of a group of 150 increasingly sweaty participants (fig. 11). In addition to

dance lessons, there are "dance times" during which audiences may dance

improvisationally and recreationally, as if at a dance club or party, to carefully curated

playlists featuring popular hit songs from the 1970s into the early twenty-first century.

Participants find themselves dancing to the Bee Gees' 1976 "You Should Be Dancing"

one moment and Sophie Ellis-Bextor's 2002 "Murder on the Dance Floor" the next.

Adams, Reeves, and Windeyer live in Canada, while Simic, O'Connell, and Pettrow are
based in New York.

[55] Bluemouth inc.'s *Dance Marathon* performance history: multiple venues in Canada
including the Harbourfront Centre, Toronto (2009); at the Cultural Olympia, part of the
2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver; at the Harbourfront Performing Arts' World Stage
Festival (2012); and in Halifax as part of the Magnetic North Festival (2014). In England,
DM has been presented in London at part of the BITE and Dance Umbrella Festival
(2011), at the Norfolk & Norwich Festival (2013), and at Mayfest in Bristol (2015).
Other international venues that have presented *DM* include the MidSummer Festival of
the Senses 2009 (Cork, Ireland), Traverse @ Lyceum Rehearsal Room, Edinburgh Fringe
Festival 2011 (Scotland), the Dance Massive Festival 2011 in Melbourne and the Ten
Days on the Island Festival 2011 in Tasmania (Australia), the Incubator Arts Project's
Other Forces Festival 2011 (New York City), and Tanztage Fabrik Festival 2015
(Potsdam, Germany). Future performances are scheduled for other locations in Germany
and the Netherlands in 2017.

Figure 11. Contestants in *Dance Marathon.* Contestants in bluemouth inc.'s *Dance Marathon*, Vancouver, Canada, 2010. Photograph by Janet Baxter, 2010.

Bluemouth inc. uses dance to guide the participants literally and figuratively step by step into movement that is increasingly physical while introducing scripted theatrical content that reveals past histories, dreams, desires, and fantasies of the bluemouth inc. performers. The components of *DM*—dance lessons, improvisational dance sessions, elimination contests, and predetermined choreographic and theatrical content—recur throughout the production. Theater scholar and practitioner Bruce Barton, who worked with bluemouth inc. as dramaturge during the creation of *DM* in 2009, describes the production as "part play, part relational event, part performance installation, part concert, part dance party, and part athletic competition…an endurance test of dancing, foot races, choreographed routines, vaudeville performances, special guest appearances, trivial

pursuit, and one wild bumper-car ride" (Barton 2009a, 582). In each performance, audiences are challenged to consider how they will respond to the content offered, which in turn influences how they will experience the event. For audiences who choose to invest fully, there exists the possibility for full immersion through the physical exertion and expression of dance while their senses are barraged via Artaud-style production elements, including choreographic and theatrical material as well as sound, video, and lighting design.

Bluemouth inc.'s core members are Ciara Adams, Stephen O'Connell, Sabrina Reeves, Lucy Simic, and Richard Windeyer. O'Connell, Simic, and Windeyer met during their studies in interdisciplinary arts, dance, and music composition at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. Reeves met O'Connell, Simic, and Windeyer through a mutual friend who also attended Simon Fraser. Adams was invited to join bluemouth inc. as an associate artist in 2003 and became co–artistic director in 2009. Bluemouth inc. has collaborated with numerous guest artists since 1998; in particular, actor Daniel Pettrow contributed to the creation of *DM* and is now a bluemouth inc. associate artist.

In the early 1990s, O'Connell, Simic, and Windeyer all worked, in different capacities, with Radix Theatre, a Vancouver-based company dedicated to collective creation.[56] Reeves and Simic are credited with collectively creating bluemouth inc.'s first project, *Mapping Currents*, which they presented at the Edgy Women Festival in 1998 in Montreal. After *Mapping Currents*, bluemouth inc. established itself as a collective of

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[56] O'Connell and Simic served as co–artistic directors of Radix Theatre for many years and Windeyer was a collaborating artist on several productions.

"artists trained in various disciplines, brought together by a common vision of sharing our diverse creative practices and forging a new language" (bluemouth inc. 2015b). Bluemouth inc. adopted collective creation as their preferred method for developing projects, drawing upon the experiences with Radix and their subsequent experimentation with the method. O'Connell describes *collective creation* as "vitally specific to Canadian sensibility," noting that the term is preferred by Canadian artists to the terms *devising* or *collaboration* (e-mail correspondence with the author, April 5, 2016).[57] Through e-mail discussions with Adams, O'Connell, Reeves, Simic, and Windeyer, I learned that bluemouth inc. does not have a fixed definition of collective creation; rather, they have a set of aesthetic principles and a philosophical stance that guides their work. The following is a synthesis of those discussions:

> Collective creation is a dynamic form of creative collaboration in which hierarchical structures are replaced with egalitarian processes that reflect the shared agreement to serve, encourage, and support what has been collectively identified as the "best idea." The removal of hierarchical structures is predicated upon the desire to challenge and facilitate the creative ingenuity of the group as a whole while celebrating and encouraging individual expertise and excellence. Through experience, bluemouth inc. has observed that despite attempts to avoid hierarchy, imbalances of power can emerge that are situational to the individuals comprising the collective or project. When imbalances of power are identified, the group works to actively dismantle them in order to create space for all voices and opportunities for all members to contribute in the conceiving, building, and producing of art. (E-mail correspondence with Ciara Adams, Stephen O'Connell, Sabrina Reeves, Lucy Simic, and Richard Windeyer and the author, April 7–22, 2016).

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[57] *The Canadian Encyclopedia* defines *collective creation* as "the technique of devising a play as a group, with or without the aid of playwright or dramaturge" (Filewod 2006).

Collective creation is not the end goal of their work but rather the means to make "immersive site-specific performances by marrying choreographed movement, text, immersive sound design, original live music, video, and film to create a cohesive, multi-sensory experience" (bluemouth inc. 2015b). In all their productions, the collective aims "to reach beyond boundaries of conventional performance to create site-specific interdisciplinary art that leads audiences and artists alike into new forms of play" (bluemouth inc. 2015b). However, *DM* is distinct within bluemouth inc.'s oeuvre for multiple reasons. First, when creating *DM*, the collective prioritized dance as both context (dance marathons), during which the core members guide audiences to play with content (dancing generated during the marathon). They do this by introducing dance styles and creating an environment that encourages interpretative and generative dancing by audiences. Second, because of the ways in which audience participation is essential to the manifestation of each performance, artists and audiences must dance together in order to manifest each performance.

In this chapter, I present a brief history of dance marathons to contextualize the form from which bluemouth inc. drew inspiration for *DM*. I then discuss how they set the conditions for *DM* to function as a production in which dance serves as both content and context. Next, I describe how the collective situates audience members as protagonists and actuates them to dance during performances of *DM*. By introducing the term *actuate*, I call attention to ways in which artists, including the members of bluemouth inc., "stir into activity" and "enliven," as well as "set in motion, energize," and "animate"

audiences within the context of immersive performance.[58] Finally, I introduce the term

coauthorality to describe the way audiences, alongside bluemouth inc.'s core members

and embedded dancers, generate and perform dance content that shapes *DM*.[59]

Setting the Conditions for *Dance Marathon*

In her book *Dance Marathons: Performing American Culture of the 1920s and*

1930s, theater scholar Carol Martin examines the development of dance marathons as

part of the economic cultural background of the United States at the beginning of the

twentieth century. Her in-depth analyses of the form acknowledges marathons as

"extremely complicated performative events" (1994, xvi). While first structured as

nonstop dancing to live music, dance marathons developed into professionalized,

grueling, gladiator-style competitive events with longer durations and additional

challenges for participants (xix).[60] Promoters hired "plants"—professional performers

who traveled with the promoters from town to town—to participate as contestants. The

plants were privy to and complicit with the promoters' aims, and functioned accordingly

to manipulate the outcomes of the marathons so that they—as well as their employers—

benefited. Competing along with the plants were individuals in dire financial

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[58] Definitions are from *Oxford Dictionaries: English*
(http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/actuate;
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english-thesaurus/actuate).
[59] In advance of every performance of *DM*, bluemouth inc. contacts members of the local
dance community in which the production will be presented in order to recruit fifteen to
twenty volunteers to perform as embedded dancers. The embedded dancers serve in
various functions during performances, which will be detailed in this chapter.
[60] Martin reproduces a quote attributed to dance marathon promoter Leo Seltzer from
1934: "The contestant is exalted to the position of combination gladiator and night-club
entertainer" (40).

circumstances who signed up as contestants in hopes of winning monetary prizes. Equally important for these individuals was the promise of a daily meal and a roof over their heads for the duration of the marathon (49). Marathons were extended over months, requiring audiences to return multiple times if they wished to follow the action and narratives of the contestants.

The promoters, being savvy, understood that the spectacle of endurance dancing alone would not sustain the interest of audiences or ticket sales (5). With this in mind, they sensationalized the marathons by incorporating various "elimination contests" to reduce the number of contestants and to put pressure on the remaining dancers to perform (55).[61] Promoters also publicized performances by popular contestants and local celebrities, and when audiences dwindled, they staged mock weddings of contestants to reinvigorate interest (42). Such tactics served to serialize the marathon as an ongoing dramatic event in which human suffering was a feature of live performance.

Previous to *DM*, bluemouth inc. created their award-winning production *Something about a River* (2002–2003).[62] Inspired in part by T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* and

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[61] Martin describes types of elimination contests that were implemented as races; one such elimination consisted of blindfolding contestants and forcing them to run in dimly lit spaces, while another consisted of taping two contestants together and having them sprint through the dance hall (55).

[62] *Something about a River* was the title of the final work, which contained three parts and was performed in different locations in Toronto: *The Fire Sermon*, performed at the Metro XXX Theatre, a defunct theater that had shown pornography; *Death by Water*, in which audiences participated in a séance in a funeral parlor; and *What the Thunder Said*, which was presented in an abandoned warehouse. The production was nominated for six Dora Mayor Moore Awards by the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts. Bluemouth inc. received the 2003 Dora Mayor Moore Award for Outstanding Independent Production for their creation and presentation of *Something about a River*.

conceived as a trilogy, *Something about a River* was presented as a five-hour event at different locations along Garrison Creek in Toronto. The third part of the work, *What the Thunder Said*, featured a softball game in which audiences participated and was a potent source of inspiration for the creation of *DM*.

Establishing that they would collectively create a dance marathon as a participatory event, bluemouth inc. researched the history of marathon dancing and outlined their goals for *DM*: "to contribute to the historical development and perception of performance; to collectively renegotiate the role of the viewer in performance; and to devise performance in a truly egalitarian environment where the project is always best served by the best idea" (bluemouth inc. 2009). In pursuit of these goals, bluemouth inc. set up conditions to enable audiences to participate in a egalitarian environment, so audiences would take on active, cooperative roles and acts of "doing" in the moment to contribute to performances through their presence, and especially through their dancing. While bluemouth inc. may have used historical accounts of the early marathons as inspiration, their approach to creating and staging *DM* differs radically from those of the original competitions, which, according to Martin, "were modeled on a version of social Darwinism" and where only the strongest—and the most strategic—dancers became winners (Martin 1994, xvi).

First, bluemouth inc. determined the size and scale of the audience that would be dancing during each performance. As Simic explains, "We read *The Tipping Point* and [author Malcolm Gladwell] talks about how you can only really create community with 150 people. Anything more than that and you start to feel like you're just one of many.…With 150 people there is the feeling that you can actually know or remember

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everybody.…There's something about that versus the indifference of 200 people, or 500 people" (Simic 2014, 29). Adams supports this strategy of limiting the audience to 150: "One person described our work as we create instant communities and I think that's a really valid way of describing it" (Adams 2014, 13). Bluemouth inc. found this limit is effective in guiding audiences toward an atmosphere of cooperation and community during performance.

Understanding that the dance marathons of the 1920s and 1930s had distinct players—emcees, promoters, contestants—bluemouth inc. debated what roles they and their audiences would assume in performances. The collective established three groups of primary performers in *DM*—bluemouth inc. core members, embedded dancers, and audience members.[63] Bluemouth inc.'s performing members are referred to throughout this chapter as *core members* but are also identified by specific "names" that indicate either function or persona. The role of each core member is designed to sustain audience participation in a specific way, and members fulfill their functions by performing predetermined choreographic or theatrical content. For example, Adams is known as

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[63] Two other groups perform in *DM*; there are "guest" artists, among them local break-dancers, recruited for a surprise interlude two-thirds of the way through the performance, as well as local celebrities or regional artists who wish to publicize their own productions through exposure in *DM*. Bluemouth inc.'s inclusion of guests echo how promoters of the 1920s and 1930s would schedule guest artists to draw crowds to the marathon, some of which lasted as long as ninety days. When *DM* is presented at festivals, artists hoping to promote their own productions are eager to make cameo appearances. These individuals enhance the choreographic and theatrical content of the performance. The other group of performers are professional musicians hired by Windeyer and Adams to be the Dance Marathon band in each city where *DM* is presented, contributing to the sonic environment that supports the dancing. Such efforts by bluemouth inc. reveal the extent to which they engage in community outreach.

Lady Jane, the lead singer of the Dance Marathon band, and her voice, energy, and

charisma motivates and guides the audience to participate in dance lessons and other

dance-related activities (fig. 12).

Figure 12. Ciara Adams in *Dance Marathon*. Ciara Adams as Lady Jane in bluemouth inc.'s *Dance Marathon*. Photograph by Janet Baxter, 2010.

Unbeknown to the audience at first, O'Connell and Simic, as the characters Little

Stevie and Ramona Snjezana Knezevic, respectively, are "embedded" as contestants.[64]

Under the guise of being contestants, O'Connell and Simic function as partners of

audience members and exemplars for the audience to follow during dance lessons. As the

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[64] For a thorough discussion of deception and betrayal in *Dance Marathon*, see Barton 2009a.

MC, Reeves is host and steward of the marathon. Pettrow, as the Referee, or the Ref,

enforces the rules of the production (fig. 13). Windeyer, known by his nickname,

"Rocket," is situated behind his drum kit onstage with the band during performances; as

bandleader, sound designer, and DJ, he conducts the sonic environment.

Figure 13. Sabrina Reeves, a contestant, and Daniel Pettrow in *Dance Marathon.* Sabrina Reeves as the MC with a contestant, with Daniel Pettrow, on the left, as the Ref, in bluemouth inc.'s *Dance Marathon*.Photograph by Janet Baxter, 2010.

Keeping in mind that "historically, the economic success of dance marathons relied

on promoters hiring and embedding eccentrically skilled performers among the actual

dance contestants to create unusual and exciting situations" (bluemouth inc. 2009), the

company constructed the role of embedded dancers as hybrids of the dance marathons'

plants and "eccentrically skilled performers." Before each *DM* tour, bluemouth inc.

recruits fifteen to twenty volunteer dancers from communities where productions will be

shown. The company welcomes all levels of dance experience; some volunteers have

professional backgrounds and degrees, while others may be avid recreational dancers.

This diversity contributes to performances in multiple ways. The embedded dancers meet

daily with Adams, O'Connell, and Simic for a week before performances to rehearse the

choreography and learn about their functions in the production—the most important being

to work with core members to encourage audiences to overcome their inhibition and

perform dance.

While the core members and embedded dancers perform the choreography and are

featured in "spotlight" moments via their singing or dancing talents, they are not the

protagonists of the marathon. Rather, as Adams explains, each audience member is his or

her own protagonist: "In *Dance Marathon*, you're the protagonist. You're actively in the

piece. Without the audience there, the piece doesn't exist; it can't. So, every single aspect

of it, and every single moment of the piece is designed to immerse the audience member

in an experience. We're carefully conducting the audience member through this

experience" (Adams 2014, 13). By casting audience members as contestants—

protagonists—in the marathon, bluemouth inc. assume that audiences possess skills,

particularly in dance, and implement tactics to convince audiences to draw upon these

skills during performance. If they accept their roles as contestants, audience participants

understand from the start that there is an expectation of engagement beyond observation.

They thus participate knowing their obligations and responsibilities, and (hopefully)

assume ownership and accountability for their actions.

Bluemouth inc. provide limited information about *DM* in publicity materials; they have found it more effective to inform audiences that they are expected to dance once they are at the venue, when they can best deploy the tactics developed for immersing them in the performance. Publicity materials for *DM* from 20092014 differ in what information was available to audiences prior to the event. Some materials explain to audiences that they will be in a dance marathon, that it will be a durational event, and that someone will emerge a winner. Almost all the materials advise wearing comfortable shoes for dancing, in a harbinger of their engagement.[65] Other materials simply state that *DM* is an interactive event.

In exchange for his or her ticket, each audience member is given a numbered pinny to wear (fig. 14). After slipping the pinny over a participant's torso, the MC asks that audience member to identify two body parts: chest and feet. The MC explains that the number on the pinny corresponds with a numbered image of feet the participant will find taped to the floor when he or she enters the dance hall. This is a subtle tactic to focus the audience on their bodies and orient them in space, as they will need to return to their numbered feet as a kind of home base throughout the performance. The MC then instructs audience members—now contestants—to locate their feet on the dance floor.

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[65] In reporting encountering a participant in a wheelchair, Adams adds, "Often the venue is more of a hindrance than the show itself. For the most part, they are able to participate without any challenges" (e-mail correspondence with the author, April 22, 2016).

Figure 14. Contestants wearing pinnies in *Dance Marathon.* Contestants wearing pinnies, with feet taped on the floor in front of them in bluemouth inc.'s *Dance Marathon*, Toronto, Canada, October 2009. Photograph by Nancy Palva, 2009.

On the dance floor, contestants find themselves facing a stranger; they are informed that this is their new dance partner for the evening. This tactic separates participants from those with whom they arrived at the performance and assigns them to new partners. As critic Martin Denton recounts, "You will be randomly assigned to dance with someone you don't know, and it will feel fine; gender is happily not taken into account—male/male and female/female couplings are as common as the traditional male/female ones; it's all about the body here, not about sexual preference" (2011). Cara Spooner, an embedded dancer in the first performances of *DM* in Toronto in 2009, relates how the

process serves the production's goals: "If you came with your partner or your date or whoever, you were split up from them so everyone was kind of equalized. Every single person in the room was now forced to be partners with a stranger. I think that kind of shared vulnerability was a huge aspect in that everyone sort of felt like they were in the same boat. There was this very real sense of awkwardness getting to know someone…but also the willingness to dive into that experience together" (Spooner 2014, 9). Bluemouth inc.'s aim is to establish an environment in which individuals perceive equal status and thus accept the conditions of participation in *DM*, which require them to embrace the concept of working together through dance to manifest the performance.

Aware that dancing—let alone dancing with a stranger—could evoke vulnerability for audiences, bluemouth inc. initially offered "optional elimination" in the first versions of *DM*. Audience members could opt out of participation if they wished; or they could stay and watch as long as they relinquished their numbered pinny, to distinguish them from the contestants. As O'Connell explains, "The first couple times [we performed *DM*] we would lose a good portion of the audience who would sit down when we offered the elimination.…They were just like, "No, I'm not into it." So we tried the free dance…then did the optional elimination after the free dance. And in the six years since we've been doing it, there have been two people that have sat down. We didn't really understand the power of the free dance until that just happened kind of by chance" (O'Connell 2014, 39).

The free dance is strategically situated before Reeves as the MC explains all the rules of the production. Lady Jane's voice and energy catalyzes the audience into motion as she recites lyrics from "Free Dance Song":

> Come on out and move it,
> Rock it and a prove it,
> You know how to do it,
> Now DANCE. (bluemouth inc. 2015a, 2)

This swift transition into the free dance helps to mediate the potentially awkward moment of an audience member's meeting the stranger who will be his or her dancing partner by focusing the person on the task of dancing: "After the free dance, you see this really interesting physiological shift….Most people start all nervous, thinking about their anxieties, but as soon as they're given three minutes to shift into being in their bodies rather than their head, and the adrenaline kicks in, they move into a completely different emotional state" (O'Connell quoted in Friedman 2011).

The MC presents five rules that guide participation in *DM*; the rules, similar to those of the early dance marathons, are intended to keep contestants in motion while controlling behavior. They help the MC steer toward crowning a pair of winners, the conclusion of the event. The rules are as follows:

> RULE NUMBER ONE: Your feet must be moving at all times.
>
> RULE NUMBER TWO: Knees may not touch the floor—floor may not touch the knees—any configuration that involves you on your knees on the floor and you are out.
>
> RULE NUMBER THREE: Picking fights with other couples is strictly prohibited and will not be tolerated.

RULE NUMBER FOUR: You will be given a 5-minute rest period every hour. If you opt out of your rest period, you may not make it up at another time.

RULE NUMBER FIVE: Sexually explicit behavior is strictly prohibited. (bluemouth inc. 2015a, 5)[66]

As enforcer of the rules, the Ref functions as the antagonist of the audience-cum-protagonist. In order to build a sense of community and camaraderie in the audience and to encourage their investment in dancing, the Ref functions as disciplinarian. Pettrow, who originated the role of the Ref, careens around the dance hall on roller skates, making use of his height to appear more intimidating to the audiences. The Ref gives the impression of panopticism, circling the contestants incessantly, all the while surveying for infractions and barking out reminders to keep moving. Under constant surveillance, audience members develop a kind of solidarity, a herd united against a predator. Pettrow describes this role and how he understands audience perceptions: "I can move quicker than anybody on the floor. And if there's not a lot of noise, you can hear me coming. I knew early on that I wanted a mic, to be domineering at any moment. The whistle and the red flag are purely focus for audience members and a little theatricality. The physicality came out from being on the skates. I intentionally overexaggerate how I look at their feet. When I'm going around, people are looking at me, and I'll look at them in the eyes and then look back at their feet. So, it's like, 'Oh, he's really watching our feet'" (Pettrow 2014, 16).

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[66] Rules 3 and 5 are particularly important for maintaining a safe space for all audiences to participate in *DM*, including children under eighteen, who are welcome to participate when in the presence of a parent or guardian.

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The Ref also offers praise. When Pettrow comes across individuals whom he perceives as particularly invested in their dancing, he encourages them as he skates past with "Looking good, Number 32, looking good!" or "You're my favorite couple tonight!" (15). Pettrow knows that the Ref is a paradoxical construct; he must adopt a "bad guy" approach to dominance for solidarity to develop in the audience. He carefully calibrates control with charm, however, so that while audiences are highly sensitive to his authoritative presence, they also notice his support of their dancing. His brutish tactics are deployed to enhance their pleasure during the event and, consciously or not, they are aware of this.

Audience participants who do not adhere to the rules, especially rules 1 and 2, risk elimination by the Ref. Bluemouth inc. incorporates several types of elimination contests, based on the early marathons. In particular, the company looked to Horace McCoy's 1935 novel *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* and Sydney Pollack's 1969 film adaptation for inspiration and created their own version of the "derby" competition, a common elimination tactic, to winnow the crowd down to a pair of winners.

As depicted in the novel and film, derbies require contestant pairs to walk as fast as possible around a track delineated in the space while in a tango-like embrace—one arm wrapped around the partner's waist and the other outstretched in front, with partners' hands clasped.[67] Bluemouth inc. transformed the derby from a foot race into a five-minute dance. The contestants' speed is controlled by a video that displays red, yellow,

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[67] Audience members are still partnered with the stranger when the first derby occurs in *DM*.

and green traffic lights. Green urges the audience go at full speed, without breaking into a run; yellow indicates to continue moving yet exceedingly slowly; at red, contestants freeze in place. Prompted by the lights, partners must work together to stay within time restrictions. During red lights, partners lean into one another, shaping and counterbalancing their bodies to maintain their frozen positions. Yellow allows the most experimentation as couples work to match one another's tempo and range of motion while continuing to advance. There are winners and losers during every derby, with the finish line often drawn arbitrarily in space. Adding to the chance of being eliminated, participants must provide correct answers in trivia quizzes presented as challenges throughout the event.

The different eliminations are "physical, artistic, knowledge-based or pure chance in nature—intended to promote a joint investment that encourages participants to playfully but thoroughly commit to their new partners as a means of protecting their own status in the event" (Barton 2009a, 587). Barton suggests that participants work cooperatively with their partners for personal benefit, that is, to remain viable as competitors in the dance marathon. While this may indeed be true, I understand his phrase "joint investment" to be indicative of how partners engaged in collectively creating performance through dancing with one another, as well as with all participants of the event, including the core company members.

In bluemouth inc.'s setting the conditions for audience participation, *DM*'s sound design is a critical mechanism. Windeyer has carefully curated the soundscape to both support the theatrical content and inspire the audience to dance. Windeyer describes the

process of developing the soundscape: "Early on, it was clear that regardless of what the MC might be telling the audience or what other performers might be doing—that we needed to keep the energy up. So there's always…some kind of rhythm…something playing in the background. The first half of the show, there's a lot of classic disco…because it's really accessible. And then I kept pushing to get more contemporary and darker, more electro and techno. I think…there's a nicely curated collection of records because of the kind of history of dancing that it enables" (Windeyer 2014, 19).

The soundscape at times motivates the audience to dance through familiar songs with cultural resonance. When the iconic 1978 song "YMCA" by the Village People is played, it triggers a series of arm gestures that are understood by many and soon everyone is performing together. More contemporary songs allow the audience to improvise dance content by drawing upon their own skills and interpretations. With each new musical track, Windeyer's soundscape offers a different sonic pathway along which participants can experiment, without their movements being dictated.

In 2009, when bluemouth inc. was developing *DM* through a creative residency at Les Place des Arts in Montreal, they invited test groups of audience members to participate as contestants. The company quickly learned that audience members were not only ready for their tasked roles—they were also willing to advocate on their own behalf to keep and even expand those roles. As O'Connell elaborates:

> We invited audiences at the end of each week of rehearsals to show what we worked on. They got pinnies, they got paired up with people. We started dancing around the audience and they were just standing there in their feet in their place, watching it. When we sat down and had a discussion with the audience, they were just like, "Wow. There was so much potential. We were so excited, and then

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basically you performed around us." The second week, we allowed them to engage more with their partners but we were still demanding their attention by screaming and doing these big dramatic gestures. Again, the audience said, "Wow. The conversation I was having with my dance partner was way interesting, but I couldn't talk, because you guys were forcing me to pay attention to something." That was the big aha moment—realizing that it was a task-based show, allowing them the agency to do what they wanted…that this particular show wasn't about us. (O'Connell 2014, 31)

Their interest in crafting their own experience showed that the test audiences were pushing against entrenched notions of themselves as passive observers. In her reflections of showings in Montreal, Simic recounts a test audience member telling her, "Your theatrics got in the way of my authentic experience with my partner" (Simic 2014, 26). Discovering that their "desire to perform got in the way of allowing the audience to have an experience" (26), bluemouth inc. reconceptualized the work, to actuate the audience during performances. Barton wrote about the talkback sessions referenced by O'Connell: "[The] participants spoke of their feeling that they and their partners had, in fact, been the most important 'characters' in the piece" (Barton 2009b, 22). Again, Spooner offers her perspective: "I remember being very struck that it was different from anything else that I had done. It seemed like this really special show where the audience was activating it. And it was actually more about the audience than it was about the performers in a sense. That everyone was kind of the star of their own *[laughs]* mini-narrative within the events" (Spooner 2014, 8). The audiences are able to activate the show because bluemouth inc. has given them new status—that of protagonist—and actuated them in ways that invite them to contribute to making the performance happen through their actions, the most important of which is dancing (fig. 15).

Figure 15. Contestants in *Dance Marathon.* Contestants in bluemouth inc.'s *Dance Marathon*, Vancouver, Canada, 2010. Photograph by Janet Baxter, 2010.

Dancing *Dance Marathon*

DM is a complex production with many layers through which the audience participates and experiences the performances. Because in this chapter it is impossible to comprehensively discuss all the ways in which bluemouth inc. engages the audience in *DM*, I focus specifically on the situations where the audience is *actuated* to dance throughout the performance. I differentiate between the terms *engage* and *actuate*, because *actuate* best defines how audiences are impelled to dance in *DM*.

As described earlier, the initial free dance allows audiences to relinquish their inhibitions and concentrate on their bodies and the task of dancing. Audiences are further

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actuated in the first section when the character Lady Jane leads a lesson of the Madison, a social dance from the 1950s. Singing out the steps and the rhythm while dancing, Lady Jane guides the audience to further expand their movement possibilities. She instructs the band to play faster while urging the contestants to keep up with the tempo, shifting the lesson into a mini-elimination contest. As the music accelerates, contestants who cannot keep up begin to self-select out or are gently moved aside to safety by a stage manager. As a planted contestant, Little Stevie is always the winner of the Madison, a tactic that singles O'Connell out from the crowd so he is recognized later when performing theatrical content.

Bluemouth inc. draws the audience deeper into their physical investigation of dance as Lady Jane performs "The History of Dance," a song that succinctly contextualizes dance historically, sociopolitically, and culturally while keeping contestants in motion. Accompanied by the Dance Marathon band, Lady Jane selects embedded dancers from the crowd to be her partners while singing and dancing the audience through dance forms from different continents and cultures, including the Argentinean tango, the waltz, and dances that emerged from the African diaspora such as the Lindy Hop Charleston.[68] Audience members familiar with the dances begin to dance as soon as they hear the forms mentioned or when they hear the sonic cues coming from the band. Those less familiar with the dances are challenged to multitask, assimilating aural cues from the song lyrics, observing the movement around them, and learning kinesthetically by doing

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[68] For more on the styles of dance the audience explores, and the complete lyrics of "The History of Dance," see Appendix B.

in the moment. Moreover, O'Connell, Simic, and the embedded dancers who perform the dances alongside Adams provide models that participants can emulate.

The first opportunity for contestants to dance while in contact with their partners during the performance comes in a lesson on the box step, a component of the waltz. The character Ramona Snjezana Knezevic is introduced, described by the MC as a "triple threat in her homeland of Balkanistan." Ramona has evidently entered the contest with the intention of taking all the winnings and Simic performs her as a take-no-prisoners competitor. Eager to show off her dancing skills, Ramona orders a male contestant to join her on the dance floor. She proceeds to boss him through the arm positions and foot pattern of the box step and then invites all the couples to join in. While everyone is dancing the box step, O'Connell, Simic, and the embedded dancers pull blindfolds from their pockets; they ask their partners to put these on and to remain still. O'Connell, Simic, and the embedded dancers perform a sequence of predetermined choreography around them, engaging in light touch while stirring up the air and changing partners. The rest of the contestants box-step with their partners as they watch the "Blindfold Dance" choreography unfold in the middle of the floor. By the conclusion of the Blindfold Dance, the audience participants have been dancing for about an hour and are given their first rest period.

While *DM*'s first section aimed simply to get the participants dancing, the second section is designed to actuate audiences to invest more deeply in movement improvisation. The MC kicks off this section by asking the audience if anyone knows

how to dance a "snowball."[69] When a contestant correctly describes a snowball as a dance that builds in size from a soloist to a group through a process of accumulation, the band starts up and the MC encourages that person to kick off the snowball. Each time the MC shouts, "Snowball!" more contestants are pulled in, and the energy of the crowd builds through spontaneous improvisation until all the contestants are dancing. The snowball ends when the MC invites Ramona to the stage to sing about her homeland of Balkanistan. Ramona takes advantage of being onstage to demand a competition of male contestants. In her broken English, she states she wants "five mans" to compete against one another in an "Iggy Pop-Off" so she can choose the best to be her partner to win the marathon. She jumps off the stage and strides through the crowd, pointing to certain contestants and ordering them to stand in the center of the dance floor.[70] Windeyer cues the 1977 driving track "Lust for Life," and the contestants begin to dance improvisationally, prompted by the energy of the song and images of Iggy Pop dancing on the video monitor.

Back onstage, Ramona yells into a microphone, urging the contestants on while also demanding bigger and more spectacular movements. The contestants comply, enlarging and accelerating their dancing while performing variations of the dance styles of pogoing

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[69] A snowball is a swing dance variation that accumulates dancers through a structure of call and response. Starting with a circle of people, one designated dancer begins to dance improvisationally at the center. When the bandleader calls "snowball," the dancer in the center responds by pulling in a partner from the circle. In the next round, the two dancers now in the center pull in two more, and the process continues everyone is dancing.

[70] Despite Ramona's stated search for "five mans," I observed that in two performances she selected individuals that I perceived as transgender. Such inclusion supports bluemouth inc.'s mission of respecting and representing different voices during the creation and performance of its work.

and moshing.[71] Together, they build that evening's Iggy Pop-Off to a thrilling crescendo, at which point Little Stevie tears off his shirt and throws himself to the floor in a display of bravado solo slam dancing. Ramona chooses Little Stevie as her partner and they continue the performance as a couple. Ending the second section is the first derby, and while it results in the elimination of many contestants, their immersion in the marathon prompts them to stay as spectators.

The intermission that follows comes midway in *DM*, each half approximately ninety minutes long. The tone and mood of the second half shifts as theatrical content— including more predetermined choreography by the core members and embedded dancers—is layered on top of the dancing competition with increasing frequency. At this point in the performance, the actuating of audiences becomes self-initiated as they exhibit more confidence and inventiveness in their generation of dance material. The third section commences and Lady Jane, Ramona, and the embedded dancers initiate a flash move composed of predetermined choreography. Audience participants—who have been dancing for over two hours—quickly learn the choreography and take over the floor. I know from rehearsals that a pathway has been set; the flash mob is crafted to move diagonally from one side of the dance hall to another, with contestants following behind Lady Jane, Ramona, and the embedded dancers. Yet each evening, I observed that once audiences knew the flash mob choreography, they embellished it, incorporating other

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[71] The pogo is a dance style that originated in the U.S. hard-core punk music scene in the late 1970s. Moshing and slam dancing developed in the punk scene in the early 1980s.

movements, changing the timing, and rerouting the pathways to perform in different spaces of the venue.

Following the flash mob is a spotlight moment for an embedded dancer who performs an improvised "Hipshake Dance" accompanied on drums by Windeyer. As the dancer finishes, Windeyer keeps up a pulsating rhythm on the drums while performing a text in a hypnotizing tone (see Appendix C). Through the text, he successfully draws all the contestants into an improvisation wherein they isolate their body parts to carve the space around them, continually expanding their range of motion and augmenting the size of their dancing. As Windeyer lets the text trail off and accelerates his drum solo, the final derby is announced, which the stage managers engineer so only six couples remain.

Ramona, who is eliminated in this derby, learns that Little Stevie wishes to stay with her rather than compete in the marathon, and they dance a romantic, slow waltz. The MC guides the remaining six couples—now semifinalists—to join them. Unexpectedly, the Ref ruptures the serenity of the waltz by gliding half naked through the remaining couples, wearing only his skates and a mini-Speedo swimsuit. He informs these couples they will need dance a "hula" so the crowd can choose the finalists who will compete for the grand prize. With humor and lightness, the Ref demonstrates a Westernized interpretation of a hula—swaying his hips and undulating his arms—and then turns it over to the couples as a structured improvisation, urging them to add their interpretations and variations. During this high-stakes moment, audiences are fully in control of actuating themselves, performing as inventively and expressively as they wish. The remaining six couples find themselves under the most scrutiny at this moment in the

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performance, and the Ref mirrors their vulnerability by exposing himself physically as well as divulging his fantasy of moving to Hawaii to live a life of ease. Adams, accompanying herself on the ukulele, sings the song "Easy," whose chorus is intended to put the couples at ease as they perform alone—no longer aided by the Ref—for the audience judging them:

> The things we can't control,
> Better to roll with it,
> Right now, all I know,
> Is that it's easy…it's so easy
> It's easy being with you. (bluemouth inc. 2015a, 34)

The MC asks an eliminated contestant to choose two couples as winners of the hula competition and the Ref takes the winners backstage to prepare for the surprise final event. The rest of the eliminated audience members have a moment to rest while the MC performs a monologue, partnered with a solo by Ramona. As Reeves's monologue accelerates and builds in intensity, the band is simultaneously building to a crescendo and increasing in volume. Simic finishes her solo and dashes out of the space as the Ref ushers in the two couples. One member of each couple is blindfolded and trying to steer a little kiddie PlasmaCar through the space while pushed by the other (fig. 16).[72]

The PlasmaCar race is a spectacular finale that unfolds in cinematic slow motion. The lights, the sound of the band, and the video images of Reeves's face projected on multiple surfaces converge to induce disorientation, which is intensified by the cheers of audience members rooting for their favorite couple. With all eyes focused on the two

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[72] The PlasmaCar is a trademarked product of PlaSmart, a Canadian-based distributor of educational toys for children.

couples, they have become the evening's penultimate performers. Lasting only forty-five

seconds, the PlasmaCar race is compelling because of the concentrated, physical effort of

the couples; there is no denying their sincere attempts to win as blindfolded partners are

pushed around the track amid the screaming crowd. Often a couple will crash their car,

and those moments are pure, unadulterated drama. When a couple crosses the finish line

first and is crowned the winner, the ebullient, chaotic atmosphere becomes more

subdued, with audience members embracing and congratulating one another for enduring

to the very end. Dance disappears at this moment; only the sweat and exhaustion of each

audience member remains as evidence of their dancing.

Figure 16. Contestants on PlasmaCars with their partners in *Dance Marathon.* Contestants seated on PlasmaCars with their partners in bluemouth inc.'s *Dance Marathon*. Photograph by Janet Baxter, 2010.

Actuating Audiences in *Dance Marathon*

When Bella Fortune declared, "You made a team of two from strangers; we laughed, we tried and held on to each other," she was acknowledging the ways in which she was actuated to participate—physically, emotionally, relationally—in *DM* alongside bluemouth inc. core members, embedded dancers, and other audience members. Rudi Laermans's concept of the "generic common," is central to why and how bluemouth inc. is able to set their audiences into motion so successfully. According to Laermans, the generic common is composed of characteristics that "co-define humanness"—"assumed capacities [of] a generic nature: the ability to think, to communicate, to feel or to imagine"; these abilities, "together with the human body's generic faculty to move or stand still in a reflexive way," function as "constituent elements in collaborative dance practices" (2012, 96). Through the softball games in their earlier piece, *What the Thunder Said*, and the first showings of *DM* in Montreal, bluemouth inc. learned how much audiences enjoyed being actuated and how eager they were to take up roles and assume responsibilities in performances. In the case of *DM*, the creators assume—correctly, it seems—that people have in common knowledge of how to organize their bodies in space and time together as a community. Through the use of dance as the primary strategy for immersing audiences, audiences are given the chance to apply and even augment their bodily knowledge throughout performances of *DM*.

Not only is the generic common an essential foundation that enables bluemouth inc. to actuate their audience, but it also is the way *DM* is structured so audiences never doubt their ability to do what is asked of them. Giorgio Agamben's "ontology of potentiality" is

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helpful in explaining how *DM* audiences easily negotiate the problem of "I can" in relation to dance. Agamben devoted much of his philosophical career to analyzing the potentiality of this concept and wrote, "For everyone a moment comes in which she or he must utter this 'I can,' which does not refer to any certainty or specific capacity but is nevertheless, absolutely demanding. Beyond all faculties, this 'I can' does not mean anything—yet it marks what is, for each of us, perhaps the hardest and bitterest experience possible: the experience of potentiality" (2000, 178). As revealed in this quote, Agamben recognizes that while all individuals possess the faculty—the capacity or power—of "I can," it is meaningless unless activated. Artist and scholar Patricia Reed expands on Agamben's quote, saying, "'I can' signifies that one has the capacity to do something, but this capacity or faculty does not necessarily entail a moment of actualization" (2010, 79). What bluemouth inc. has done with *DM* is to steer audiences toward activating their "I can" by designing opportunities for them to apply agency during performances by dancing. Barton recounts that "in the first run of the production, audience members often strove to remain in the midst of the embedded dancers, no matter how difficult or demanding the movement sequences became. Understandably, participants were highly reluctant to be denied their hard-won personal agency" (2009a, 600). Through this agency, audiences can maximize the potentiality of their experience as full sensorial and corporeal entities.

Bluemouth inc. have depended upon the audience's generic common in previous productions, but never more so than in *DM*. The collective are interested in human potential and are cognizant that audiences are composed of individuals whose identities

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are multiple and diverse, with commonalities but also differences. The audience's improvisational dances, partnered as they are with the curated sound score, reflect both commonalities and differences. The multiplicity of the audience is revealed through their dancing; as they perform, they make apparent their different movement histories, muscular memories, and individual personalities, all of which contribute to and shape each performance as a unique, danced event. In *DM*, bluemouth inc. has established audience participation and immersion in a shared aesthetic experience as the common cause, which, in turn, drives the generic common of dancing. Audiences, once actuated, become immersed and increasingly invested in their participation. Especially in the second half, audience participants are determined to stay on the dance floor and work to learn the predetermined choreography as quickly as possible, to stay involved.

While bluemouth inc. core members, particularly O'Connell and Simic, performing as contestants, take primary responsibility of actuating audiences to dance, the number of audience participants precludes them from doing this alone. The embedded dancers learn during their first rehearsal that they are responsible for encouraging the audience members with whom they are paired to dance.[73] As Spooner recounts, "Right from the

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[73] Claire Bishop's theory of "delegated performance" might hold that the embedded dancers, and possibly the audiences of *DM*, are a form of outsourced labor. Bishop defines *delegated performance* as "the act of hiring nonprofessionals or specialists in other fields to undertake the job of being present and performing at a particular time and a particular place on behalf of the artist, and following his or her instructions" (Bishop 2012, 91). These terms have political and economic implications for labor and representation that are not the focus of this chapter. In addition, I note that the Berlin-based artist collective Gob Squad uses what codirector Nina Tecklenburg describes as "remote-acting" technique—audiences, wearing headphones, are instructed how to perform actions during performances and thus "become the performers' messengers,

very beginning, it was always in the back of my mind in terms of the role that I was

learning…how we were to be partnered up with a member of the public…and how we

were to…care for them in a way" (Spooner 2014, 4). As Spooner's quote suggests, the

embedded dancers act as intermediaries, existing in a place between the conditions set by

bluemouth inc. and the participation of audiences. Their role is complex. On the one

hand, they perform the predetermined choreography and are privy to many aspects of the

production in advance, although many express surprise and delight at how all the

elements—dramaturgy, dance, music, video, and sound—are integrated when the

audience is present. As Katy Noakes, an embedded dancer in the Bristol performances,

noted, "When it came to performing *Dance Marathon*, we [the embedded dancers] were

watching for the first time as well. We hadn't seen all the choreography. We hadn't seen

the art that happens *between* the audience and performers" (Noakes 2015, 3; italics reflect

emphasis in speech). On the other hand, the embedded dancers are an essential part of the

infrastructure of "I can," as evident in their responsibility to assist in actuating audiences

through dance during performance.

The embedded dancers use various strategies to actuate audiences to dance, trying to

determine a partner's comfort level in order to make decisions of how and when to

engage. Frances Brown, a member of a local swing dance club in Halifax, commented on

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prosthesis-like extensions of ourselves and our improvisations.…The participants become
so preoccupied that they have no time to fully consider the meaning and style of their
actions and words. As a result, their actions look astonishingly authentic" (Tecklenburg
and Carter 2012, 29). I focus on my concept of *actuating*, which I understand as different
from these two terms, as I feel it suggests a kind of empowerment of audiences and
represents an altogether different example of how artists such as bluemouth inc. are
further complicating notions of participation in live performance.

being an embedded dancer in *DM* at the 2014 Magnetic North Festival in that city: "I have a lot of energy and I can be really overwhelming, so at the beginning, to make the other person feel more comfortable, I didn't dance as crazy and I tended to mirror what it was that they were doing…so it seemed a little like we were dancing together, rather than doing our own thing. Later on, when they seemed to be more comfortable, I'd back off and they would be comfortable to do their own thing" (Brown 2014, 10). In a reflection for *Dance Current* on her participation in *DM*, Spooner eloquently wrote, "My focus isn't winning; it's the participants' experience. To intentionally integrate them into the complexity of the show and allow them to fully experience the *Dance Marathon*'s potential is my sole purpose. I play a supporting role (along with the other planted dancers and bluemouth inc. members), assisting the protagonists on their journey in the marathon. We blindfold them, we teach them dance steps, we play with their emotions, break out in spontaneous choreography.…We support the event; they live in it" (Spooner 2009). Spooner's quote reflects the ways that the embedded dancers serve the goal of actuating audiences to dance by offering their dancing as an invitation to dance.

Raphael Martin, an audience member who attended *DM* in Halifax in 2014, remarked, "They [bluemouth inc.] do a very good job about contextualizing the atmosphere and making it feel very open and accessible.…They were very good about leading you in, so already my body was very relaxed.…I just relaxed into it. In *Dance Marathon*, the audience is the material and the journey is the performance" (Martin 2015, 20). Ann-Marie Kerr, an audience member in *DM* at the 2014 Magnetic North Festival, shares her experience of being physically actuated to dance, saying, "There becomes

some sort of agreement, a physical, nonspoken agreement of what's happening" (Kerr 2014, 13). The quotes from embedded dancers and audiences reveal how the structures of *DM, along with* the efforts of the core members and embedded dancers, support the goal of actuating audiences by triggering their potentiality of 'I can.' The role of embedded dancers is to mirror the movements of the audiences, make eye contact with them, negotiate touch, and modulate their movements along a spectrum, from passivity to intensity, which serves the production by establishing an environment that encourages and actuates the dancing of the audience. Actuating the audience in *DM* in fact leads to the development of a unique generic common that is shared by the contestants of each individual performance. In this generic common, audiences find possibilities to activate their "I can" by learning, doing, and dancing together.

Deepening Immersion through Coauthorality

So far I have focused on how *DM* actuates its audience participants. Yet while actuating is a strategy for immersing audiences, it also has another purpose: it is the means by which audiences come to be coauthorial. After audiences are actuated, I propose that they shift into *states of being co-authorial*, for which I present the term *coauthorality*. I base my concept of coauthorality on Barthes's theory of the "death of the author," in which he relocates the authority of making meaning from a text from the author to the reader. I deploy Barthes's theory to explore how authority and authorship are playing out in new ways in immersive performance as coauthorality. In the case of *DM*, audiences not only perform the dances they learn; they also generate dance content alongside bluemouth inc. core members and embedded dancers. I extend Barthes's ideas

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to consider the possibilities of coauthorality to explain the agency applied by audiences within structures meant to immerse them. The dance content generated by audiences constitutes the performance; and at the same time it is also the mechanism through which they make meaning of the experience. Thus, coauthorality functions in two ways, as an outcome of actuation that deepens immersion and as a tool for meaning making.

Performance studies scholar Melanie Bennett participated as an audience member in one of the first performances of *DM* in Toronto in 2009 and observed the following: "As the night wore on, I began to feel more confident about my longevity and dance moves and found myself performing for the judges and those already eliminated" (M. Bennett 2010, 98). Bennett's statement suggests that her confidence grew through her involvement in dancing and emboldened her to invest more in her performance as a contestant. As a contestant (meaning protagonist), she understood that she had the ability ("I can") to dance, as well as the authority to revise and invent while performing for the judges and other audience members. At the risk of reading too much into Bennett's statement, I suggest that as she became more confident in her movement, she became more invested in the performance, which in turn, enabled her to make meaning from it. Coauthorality, in the case of *DM*, is generating dance content, *and* the process of making meaning from dancing. As Bennett's quote suggests, audiences become increasingly invested in generating movement as the performance progresses, taking over the floor and dancing with their own interpretations and expressions. Although the audience is not "rewriting" the production, their bodily involvement operates as textual material, which can be interpreted as their re-reading of the performance as they work out their

understanding of it through dancing. It is through their corporeal effort—their sweat, their muscle fatigue, and their dancing—that they are actively contributing to and making meaning of the performance.

An anecdote from Simic from a performance in the town of Norwich, England, suggests how meaning created by audience members emerges through dancing:

> When we were in Norwich, I was dancing with a man, maybe a little bit older than me, maybe my age…and he was a little bit reserved in the beginning.…At first he was like, "Oh, I think I need a drink. I think I need another drink. I think…" You know? He told me, "I won tickets through the radio.…I didn't know I would be dancing. I thought I'd be watching other people dance, which I love to do, but I'm a little bit—." And then he started noticing the "YMCA" video—and he's was sort of like, "Oh, OK." And he became more and more open. Later he told me, "I didn't know what to expect. This has been an incredible evening for me.…My feet are hurting right now—I'm wearing my father's shoes, and it's the first time I've worn them since my father passed away. My father's dancing with me right now…and my father loved dancing." It was so beautiful to me—you never know what's going on in someone's life and how they can attach their history. (Simic 2014, 33)

This is a moment of coauthorality; the audience member became more comfortable when actuated to dance, felt his confidence in dancing evolve, and shared a story with Simic, thus creating a unique moment of performance for both her and himself. Simic has performed *DM* over fifty times with over seven thousand audience members, yet this man's voice and story is inscribed in her memory, retaining significance as an example of how audiences contribute to performances.

Sarah Murray, a producer who first attended *DM* in Edinburgh in 2011 and subsequently booked the production for additional performances, remarked, "*Dance Marathon* has a different demand of audience and it is a shared experience, even as you are having an individual experience. You catch on quickly to the setup but it does mean

that you observe more carefully the people in the space and what your relationship to them might or could be. What is elegant about this show is that it does allow you to build relationships within and amongst the audience and think about your response to them. *Dance Marathon* seems much more about the collective experience" (Murray 2014, 4). Machon suggests that expertise in deploying immersive practices can be assessed when "the artist or the company [has] an authoritative grasp of the artistic potential and creative constraints of the form…in order to enable the participant in the event to have a full, undeniable immersive experience" (2013, 100). Through bluemouth inc.'s "authoritative grasp" of collective creation, they succeeded in creating *DM*—as indicated in the statements of critics, scholars, audiences, and core members themselves—as a fully immersive experience that offers opportunities for audiences to engage in coauthorality.

It is important to note that I am not suggesting that coauthorality is the same thing—or provides the same outcomes—as the collaborative processes of collective creation. Through collective creation, artists such as bluemouth inc. members establish the context and content of the productions they offer audiences. When I queried bluemouth inc. core members about coauthorality, I received some push back from them about the role of the audience. Windeyer, for example, observed, "The *DM* audience…do not have the ability to revise/change the larger structures and sequences of the event in response to their individual or collective experiencing of it. To my mind, if they are not permitted to revise/create the event's materials, sequences, structures then they cannot be considered co-authors" (e-mail correspondence with author, April 16, 2016). Indisputably, bluemouth inc. are the authors of *DM* as a production and indeed, audiences are not

coauthors as the collective might understand it in the sense that they did not design its structures and cannot fundamentally change them during performance. However, these structures designed by bluemouth inc. are the exact mechanisms that enable coauthorality of the audience.

As exchanges with bluemouth inc. core members indicate, audiences' views of immersive performance do not always align with the intentions or perceptions of artistic directors and dancers/performers. While that is true of any production, immersive performance gives us an opportunity to approach this incongruity differently because of the explicit roles given to audiences. In fact, some of my interviews with bluemouth inc. core members reveal that they were surprised by how much the audience wanted the opportunity to engage.[74] It is important to acknowledge productions and performances as spaces in which multiple things can and do occur; and this is particularly so in immersive productions, where indeterminacy is magnified through audience participation and action. A production can be tightly choreographed *and* afford the audience agency, or at least

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[74] As Stephen O'Connell recounts: "I remember a moment during *Dance Marathon* in Cork, Ireland, when a contact improv dancer unknowingly decided to test the democracy of the show by taking the floor during the 'Rain' section. I remember thinking at the time—I am not really enjoying what he is doing—and wanted to shut him down, but realized there was little I could do because we had invited the audience to insert themselves into the piece. We obviously determined the structure of the show and curated the content, but it was the transparency and malleability of what we had constructed that allowed for moments like that to occur. I bring up that moment because I believe it illustrates how the degree of co-authorship in *DM* is greater than most of our other shows. In *DM*, the audience often surprises us with wonderful, unexpected moments, like a little girl singing a song during one of the spotlight moments and we feel like we designed it that way. However, other times some one does something that we don't want, like a young woman dancing around Little Stevie with a silk scarf during the 'Yellow Bike' scene and we can't control it" (e-mail correspondence with the author, April 17, 2016).

perceptions of agency. Such perceptions reflect the desires of audiences, and while they may in fact be experiencing a fantasy of agency, this is indeed what seems to compel audiences to participate in immersive performance.

Bluemouth inc. have created an inherent friction in *DM* by situating a dance competition in an environment intended to foster and support collective contribution and egalitarianism. That said, bluemouth inc. also play with the tension between egalitarianism and collectivism in order for *DM* to be perceived by audience as an experience that is playful while emotionally and dramaturgically complex. Bluemouth inc.'s aim is not competition; it is to actuate the audience to dance, to keep them moving, discovering, and creating in relation to one another. On their website's home page, bluemouth inc. ask, "What level of experience are you committed to having?" They seem to be posing this question to themselves as much as to their audiences, particularly in *DM*. Perhaps another question should be posed alongside this, which would be "What level of coauthorality is bluemouth inc. comfortable with audiences having during their performances?" There is a tension between what bluemouth inc. say about *DM* and what they enable for audiences during performances. On the one hand, the company's members could contest the existence of *DM* coauthorality because audiences cannot revise the inherent structures of the production. On the other hand, statements from audiences suggest they perceive themselves as having agency, having been cast as contestants and encouraged to participate, in a situation where there is "no 'us and them' divide," to realize the performance through the danced contributions of everyone

present.[75] According to Bennett, "*Dance Marathon*'s achievement is entirely contingent on the spectators' response and contribution to the narrative" (M. Bennett 2010, 98). While bluemouth inc. have the authority to revise or restructure the production, they cannot revise or re-create all the dance content of a performance. If *DM* was a palimpsest, the production would always retain its original form *and* bear the traces of the thousands of audience members who have performed it.

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[75] When exiting the performance in Bristol, England, on May 19, 2016, an audience participant used the phrase "no 'us and them' divide" when identifying the audience (the "us") and the bluemouth inc. performers (the "them"). For more such phrases, see the word cloud in Chapter III.

CHAPTER VII

IMPLICATIONS OF DANCE AND IMMERSIVE PERFORMANCE

"If dance only does what we assume it can do, it will expire." When reading this

statement by William Forsythe on the flier advertising his evening-length work *Sider* at

the BAM 2013 Next Wave Festival, I was immediately struck by its bold assertion.[76]

While undoubtedly related to the production itself, where dancers perform choreography

reflecting rhythms of a sixteenth-century text in an interdisciplinary investigation of

dance and linguistics, the statement also underscores Forsythe's commitment to invention

and discovery. I tacked up the flier where I could see it while completing this

dissertation. Forsythe's declaration, particularly his merging of caution and provocation

within one sentence to impel thinking and action, was inspiring in light of how dance is

expanding as a discipline in the twenty-first century and, in particular, how dance is

contributing to new forms of performance that challenge ideas about audience

engagement.

In this chapter, I consider how the productions featured in these case studies are

"doing" things differently with dance, in particular how dance contributes to the design of

immersive productions and how it serves as a strategy for immersing audiences. I present

examples of how the productions use dance in ways other than might be expected. While

SNM, *TSF*, and *DM* were created and are performed by professionals, they provide

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[76] Flier in the collection of the author. For more on *Sider*, see
http://www.bam.org/dance/2013/sider?alttemplate=mobileevent&date=.

audiences with new kinds of experiences with and of dance, including opportunities to create and perform dance within structures meant to immerse them. In *SNM*, audiences perform a tandem dance that exists parallel to that of the professional dancers; in *TSF*, audiences are captured as scene partners through the choreography of the action framework; and in *DM*, audiences dance to compete as contestants in a performance that is possible only through their participation and coauthorality. Through comparative analyses of these productions I discuss how dance is contributing to the development of a broad range of immersive tactics. Equally important, the use of dance in these productions—particularly the inclusion of audiences as subjects of choreography—contributes to the field of dance by problematizing expectations of what dance is, what it can be, and who performs it. Finally, I suggest possibilities for future research that could extend thinking about the implications of dance and immersive performance for fields beyond dance, including theater, performance, audience, media, and cultural studies.

Contributions of Dance to Immersive Performance

Immersive performance is inherently interdisciplinary, with artistic directors merging conventions from multiple forms of live performance—namely, dance, theater, performance art, circus, and music—with installation art and new media technologies with the goal of achieving immersion for audiences. While Punchdrunk, Third Rail, and bluemouth inc. do not publicize *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM* specifically as dance, what sets these productions apart as works of immersive performance is the central role of dance in each. Dance is not just one discipline among many used to create *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM*. Rather, dance—specifically choreography—is a primary principle of design in these productions;

it is critical to their infrastructure and deployed as a key strategy for immersing audiences during performances. As the first immersive productions of the twenty-first century to achieve sustained critical and commercial success, *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM* can be considered pioneering examples. Punchdrunk, Third Rail Projects, and bluemouth inc. have used essential concepts, frameworks, and techniques from dance in expanded ways to augment experiences of live performance for audiences. Therefore, dance and choreographic structures have significantly contributed to and irrevocably shaped both practices and perceptions of immersive performance as a new form of contemporary art.

Choreography as an "Expanded Practice"

Dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster and dance artist and theoretician Mårten Spångberg claim that choreography is no longer bound to dance. Rather, they assert it has expanded beyond structuring the movements of dance into practices that have much broader applicability when guiding and designing different types of movement in the world (Foster 2011, 15–72; Spångberg 2012). In particular, Spångberg uses the phrase "choreography as expanded practice" and states: "Choreography is today emancipating itself from dance, engaging in a vibrant process of articulation. Choreographers are experimenting with new models of production, alternative formats, have enlarged the understanding of social choreography considerably and are mobilizing innovative frontiers in respect of self-organizing, empowerment and autonomy" (Spångberg 2012).

One of the ways that choreography has expanded is in the creation of new audience engagement models such as immersive performance, which emerged from artists' interest in reconfiguring the role of audiences. Punchdrunk, Third Rail, and

bluemouth inc. expanded choreography into a process through which audiences encounter and make meaning from performances through their own physical discoveries.

Choreography as an expanded practice as operating within *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM* went beyond its direct attachment to dance as an art form that is expected to be presented under certain conditions in specific places as a tool to organize the movements of the dancing body. Choreography captures every movement that goes beyond dance and, at the same time, relocates dance from its established traditional notions and places it in new realms, as it is in immersive performance. And, as Foster explains, choreography can "interpreted as a score or a set of principles that guide spontaneous invention" and it is this interpretation of choreography that shaped the design of *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM* for audience participation and leads to their immersion (Foster 2011, 3). In addition to the predetermined choreography performed by hired professional dancers, the choreography of these productions is the plans or scores created by the artistic directors and *performed by the audience.*

The phrase "spontaneous invention" evokes the concept of improvisation, which I clarify here in relation to these productions. Choreographers have long used improvisation as a tool to invent movement and support the creation of choreography; improvisation is also used as a form of performance itself. Today, it is generally accepted that choreography and improvisation are distinct modes of performance and that they can also coexist within a single work of performance. What is key to my research, however, is how the artistic directors of these three productions have incorporated improvisational

scores as a design element through which audiences generate movement that contributes to the overall choreography of immersive performance.[77]

In *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM*, improvisation serves *both* as a tool during the development of the predetermined choreography (contract improvisation, in particular, is a significant part of the creative process) *and* as the process through which audiences include themselves as part of the choreography of the performances. It is this inclusion of self through improvisational movement scores intended as choreography in performance that is critical for immersion of audiences in *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM*. While the movement performed by the audience is, for the most part, improvisational rather than predetermined, it is nonetheless choreography because it has been made possible by the scores or frameworks created by artistic directors for audiences to perform. In these productions, improvisational structures serve as frameworks in which different kinds of actions are generated, and it is because the productions have been choreographed for audience involvement that movement is revealed through their bodies. It is generally accepted that there are no right or wrong movement choices when dancers are improvising during classes or rehearsals; rather, there are only choices that are more effective than others based on the intention of the improvisation. Thus it is the same for the audiences in these productions; other than deliberately disregarding the rules set forth

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[77] Is this inclusion of the audience an extension of the democratic philosophy espoused by the early contact improvisers? Perhaps. We know that representational politics is of interest to the creators of *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM*—they all want audiences from diverse constituencies to feel immersed in the worlds they create. Moreover, perhaps, the intention is just that to immerse audiences rather than to make an overt political statement.

at the start of each production, there are no right or wrong choices, just choices that are more effective than others in allowing audiences to guide their experiences. Working within these parameters, in worlds that are choreographed for them, audiences work through the indeterminate nature of the scores to create their own exploratory dances and perform them alongside the dancers as the choreography of the production.

Statusing the Body of the Audience

Punchdrunk, Third Rail Projects, and bluemouth inc. have been successful in using dance to make audiences complicit in immersive performance. *Statusing* is the term I use to describe how creators of immersive performance give audiences roles and responsibilities that move them into new capacities and engender new experiences including—but not limited to—immersion.[78] Through these strategies, audiences are upgraded to a new status—usually to that of protagonist—so they can better perceive of themselves as part of and agents within the worlds in which they are immersed.[79] As protagonists, audiences are expected to participate differently in immersive productions than during other live performance events, meaning they are offered opportunities to do

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[78] The noun status has been used in verb form—*statusing*—within systems management, computer programming, and software engineering since the 1990s to describe the tracking of project completion. While considered jargon and nonstandard English, a search on Google Scholar yields over two thousand results. *Statusing* as a verb is referenced on sites such as Urban Dictionary online, which provides the following definition: "(v.) the act of updating one's Facebook status, often more than once in a short period of time." Both the concept and the act of statusing is not confined to Facebook, however, as individuals provide updates about their personal behavior or condition via Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Yik Yak, Peach, Bebo, and Pinterest, as well as myriad other platforms (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=statusing).

[79] Machon states in her Table 1, titled "Traditional Theatre vs. Immersive Theatre," that during an immersive theatre experience, "you are aware that you have taken on a character, you are playing out a role" (2013, 54–55).

more than watch and listen. In other words, statusing of audiences is specifically about

the body; it is the upgrading of the audience from a passive observer to a mobile body.[80]

This "upgrade" for the audience is inherent to immersive performance because it is more

than what the audience sees and hears; it is what the audience does. Statusing, then,

reflects a process of being and doing in the moment, and even being aware of it. In *SNM*,

TSF, and *DM*, audiences become part of the action as they climb a staircase in *SNM*, join

in the tea party in *TSF*, or dance the Madison in *DM*. In immersive performance,

audiences also witness one another in the action of "doing" and notice changes in status.

For example, my fellow audience members watched as King Duncan took my wrist to

enlist me in his search of the bedroom in *SNM*; audiences watched as others pick up the

choreography of the tea party in *TSF*; audiences watch one another be called forth to

perform a snowball or other dances in *DM*. It is interesting to note that audience members

sometimes repeatedly attend immersive performances as a way to advance their status

within the production, particularly by gaining more knowledge of the space and the

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[80] My term *statusing* is based on the concept of status as put forth by theater practitioner Keith Johnstone. Johnstone frames status as *something one does*, rather than a reflection their social standing (1981, 36). Additionally, I draw from the practice of statusing in social media, for example, posting information about one's activities, accomplishments, or current condition for others on various shared Internet platforms. This reflects, among other things, my understanding of the impact of new media technologies on the body. Statusing in social media prioritizes the body; visual representation of the body in photos or videos, with the body often engaged in action or in motion—we witness other bodies "doing" in social media posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and in blogs. I should clarify that statusing the body of audiences does not mean lessening the status of the professional dancers hired to perform. These productions require the technical prowess, virtuosic interpretations of choreography, somatic awareness, and powerful presence of dancers, yet the intended outcome of these performances is different for audiences. The presence and skills of the dancers are deployed as instruments through which to enable and enhance immersive experiences for the audience.

timing of the choreography. They also strive to advance their expertise in performing the production through their repeated visits, strategizing to get through the space to certain events and performances, including one-on-one interactions with performers.

Statusing of the body happens in these productions through choreographic structures that prioritize the body—the bodies of the audience and of the professional dancers. Dance here specifically enables statusing of the body to occur, as the audience members can upgrade their position from that of a passive observer to protagonist only through engagement of their bodies in the choreographic structures that are the contexts of these productions. By statusing the body, Punchdrunk, Third Rail, and bluemouth inc. offer audiences new ways of existing in and experiencing live performance. The productions each require audiences to access their kinesthetic and proprioceptive faculties alongside their visual, aural, and cognitive faculties when experiencing and making meaning from performance. Audiences bring their inherent knowledge of the body to these performances and through their embodied experiences and interactions learn to use "the body's movement as a potential conduit to new ways of perceiving and orienting oneself in the world" (Foster 2011, 116). Through experimentation with dance, by pushing to see how far dance as a language and dance conventions such as choreography and improvisation can go, these productions have turned audiences into performing bodies. Audiences are not just emancipated from their seats in *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM*; audiences are conceptualized as individuals who receive visual and aural information as well as feel and make sense of choreographic content through kinesthesia and corporeal engagement to contribute through movement to performances.

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These productions contribute to new conceptions of the audience and their capacities within live performance. Foster, discussing dance in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, remarked that "choreography participated in a redefinition of physicality," wherein dancers gained more autonomy and authorship because choreography was introduced as a way to manage movement (2011, 176). Now in the twenty-first century, the ways in which Punchdrunk, Third Rail, and bluemouth inc. are statusing the body through choreographic structures is contributing to a redefinition of the physicality of the audience. Through choreographic structures, audiences are guided to experiment with a "more dynamic and three-dimensional sense of one's physicality" (177). This redefined physicality of audiences is leading to what Foster calls "new kinds of competence," which include thinking and learning through movement and using dance as a process of understanding (188). In addition to audiences learning new competencies, the artistic directors themselves learned how best to deploy dance to enhance the kinesthetic and proprioceptive awareness of audiences in order to achieve immersion in performances.[81] The artists learned how to make worlds saturated with dance so audiences could make meaning from the dance they observe around them as well as from the movement they themselves are performing.

Interestingly, the professional dancers play a major role in statusing the bodies of the audience. The dancers serve as instruments through which content is communicated in all

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[81] Dancers hired by these companies also noted in interviews the kinds of skills they have learned through the creation and/or performing of immersive productions. These skills include but are not limited to increased sensitivity to how they negotiate space in relation to audiences and use of eye contact to address audiences directly yet non-verbally.

three productions and in their so doing, the choreography they perform serves as stimuli for audiences. Audiences are compelled to follow the dancers performing choreography in *SNM*; dancers perform choreography to capture audiences as scene partners in interactive moments in *TSF*, and in *DM*, the choreography performed by bluemouth inc. core members and embedded dancers actuates audiences to dance so they in turn generate dance that contributes to performances. As Foster notes, "Choreography encourages awareness of one's body" and in these performances, the choreography of dancers both orients the audience and draws them in; the momentum and force of the dancers spurs audiences to action (2011, 9). Audiences pick up on impulses from dancers, approximate the rhythmic energy and speed of dancers in order to participate fully and gather meaning from experience.

The presence and close proximity of the dancers also influences the physicality of audiences; dancers use their kinesthetic expertise to guide audiences toward heightened sensorial and immersive experiences and motivate them to move through space. While watching dance on a proscenium stage can stimulate kinesthetic responses for audiences, numerous audience members I interviewed expressed the thrill of having dancers move in close proximity to them because they felt the impact of the dancers' effort in their own bodies. The diminished distance compounded the kinesthetic responses that audiences had when in relation to and observing the dancers.

To summarize, in the immersive productions of *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM*, statusing the body through dance contributes to a redefinition of physicality for audiences, which leads to their acquisition of new kinds of competencies. And with this new conceptualization of

the audience, the artistic directors understood that the designs of the production had to

shift. In order for audiences to be able to function within and "operate" the performances,

the artistic directors had to carefully calibrate the space, time, and size of audiences so

audiences are excited and challenged without being burdened, frustrated, or intimidated.

Thus, they turned to choreography as an effective system of organizing human

movement. *SNM* audiences may not realize that Punchdrunk has set them up to

participate in an improvisational movement score when they take on the role of

anonymous guests in the McKittrick Hotel. Nor may they be fully aware of how the

choreography is capturing them in *TSF*. *DM*'s contestants, immersed in the throes of

competition, may not completely comprehend until the night is over that their

improvisational dancing was the performance.[82] Instead, audiences who participate in

SNM, *TSF*, and *DM* are moved by the ability of dance to affect and immerse the body

physically, cognitively, and emotionally in performance. It is specifically because of how

the artistic directors have conceptualized the audience and designed choreographic

structures for them that audiences are able to enter into and perform these productions.

<div align="center">Choreographing Time and Space</div>

Choreography was deployed to reconfigure notions of spatiality and temporality in

these productions, representing another example of "dance done differently"—or in other

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[82] In this way, I acknowledge that choreography within immersive performances is not so different from choreography presented in more traditional contexts, such as proscenium theatres. In either case, choreography that does not draw audiences in or does not immerse them in whatever world the choreographer wishes to create onstage, will fail and audiences will turn their attention away to the program, retreat into their own thoughts, or look at their cell phones.

words, choreography as an expanded practice.[83] Audiences must move through space and

experience time to make sense of performances; for this to be possible, the venues for

SNM and *TSF* were created, and locations are carefully chosen and adapted for

performances of *DM*. When designing the venues for *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM*, the artistic

directors conceived of the spaces not as empty containers but as choreographed spaces

that actively influence bodies to trigger movements. In other words, space has been

conceptualized in all three productions in alignment with philosopher and sociologist

Henri Lefebvre's notion that space serves as both "product and producer" (Lefebvre

1992, 142). In these productions, space is both a product of and produces the movements

and actions generated within its structures. The spaces of these productions are

choreographed to be the boundaries of the *product* encountered—the merging of

choreography, dramaturgy, and scenography. At the same time, the choreography of

these spaces establishes the parameters through which the movements of the audiences

are *products* and *producers* of space as well as *products* and *producers* of choreography.

Dance moves audiences into and through the worlds of these immersive productions

because the spaces are choreographed for and by them during performances. For *SNM*

and *TSF*, objects in the space play a key role in choreographing bodies. Objects invite

audience to touch and operate them: there are beds to lie down in, sofas and chairs to

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[83] All three productions also choreograph, in a sense, what audiences will wear, by telling them in publicity materials and pre-show reminder e-mails to wear comfortable shoes. *SNM* and *TSF* include a statement in their materials that alerts audiences that the productions are not suitable for people uncomfortable walking, standing, or being alone for extended periods of time. On the other hand, *DM* is typically performed in venues accessible to people of all abilities, and bluemouth inc. do their best to include anyone who wishes to participate.

lounge upon, cabinets to open, and many small items of ephemera to examine. In *DM*, it is the negotiation of bodies around one another that occupies the audience; audiences must navigate positive and negative space of and around bodies within the open dance hall.

In *SNM* and *TSF*, dance is happening throughout the venues at all times, but audiences do not experience it simultaneously because they participate in or witness it (or not) at different times depending on where their personal score (*SNM*), or their curated pathway (*TSF*), takes them. While the professional dancers in *SNM* and *TSF* perform sections of choreography repeatedly within precise time limits to keep the performance progressing correctly, audiences experience time as nonlinear and fractured. On the other hand, *DM* is a "synchronous" performance, meaning that all audience members experience the same time and space of the performance. Because of the duration of *DM*, audiences are watching the ebb and flow of energy over time, including the fatigue and exhaustion that inevitably occurs as well as the rallying of bodies for one last-chance dance. The synchronous, durational reality of *DM* affects how audiences perceive not only the temporality of the event but also their dancing, as well as the abstracted dramaturgical narrative of the production. Whether the audience is experiencing space and time as fractured (as is the case in *SNM* and *TSF*) or synchronously participating in *DM*, audiences in all three productions are directly participating the time and space of performance as performers themselves.

The artistic directors worked with dancers to develop exercises specifically intended to refine spatial awareness so they can dance within inches of audience members without

making contact. In addition, the artistic directors use known forms such as contact improvisation to further sensitize dancers to touch and how to use touch effectively when interacting with audiences. Dancers and artistic directors work together to determine how best to transfer principles of contract improvisation such as weight and counterbalancing to scenography. When dancers perform this augmented version of contract improvisation with the scenography, audiences are further attuned to the space around them. The furniture, walls, floor, and objects occupying the space take on new significance after having been used by the dancer to perform the choreography and communicate meaning. Through these productions, dancers gain new skills to perform in different ways for audiences by having access to movement along a spectrum ranging from pedestrian actions to more virtuosic choreography when relating to sets and objects.

The central role of dance and choreography as a primary principle of design, the introduction of choreography as an expanded practice, and the statusing of the body of the audience serve as the lenses through which I understand the strategies deployed by the creators of *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM*. These strategies solicit kinesthetic responses from audiences and enhance their experiences of immersion, thus expanding and enriching notions of audience participation in contemporary performance. At the same time, analyses of these strategies provide chances to reexamine the role of the audience in the realm of live performance, which in turn opens up possibilities for new scholarly discourses to emerge.

Next Steps in Research

In creating *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM*, Punchdrunk, Third Rail, and bluemouth inc. acknowledged the bodies of dancers and audiences as creative forces and created works in which both the bodies of dancers *and* audiences are required for performances to occur. This is dance done differently; Punchdrunk, Third Rail, and bluemouth inc. have applied choreography as an expanded practice and, in so doing, contributed to the discourse surrounding the representational politics of bodies in dance. Through *SNM*, *TSF*, and *DM*, these artists are questioning and challenging what and who a dancing body can be during performances of choreography and what dance in live performance can be in the twenty-first century. In addition, because of how choreography is understood and applied as expanded practice, the productions present reconfigured parameters for further discussion of what dance spectatorship is and what it might be in the future. But my research does not end here. Below I sketch out two possible future directions for my research to take.

Personal Technology Use and Immersion

Foster, when describing her participation as an audience member in site-specific productions by the Berlin-based collective Rimini Protokoll and Philadelphia's Headlong Dance Theater, in which she traveled through the city while guided by instructions delivered via her cell phone, states that "new kinds of competence" are required from both audiences and performers in productions that are "structured by a score of directives" (2011, 188). I am interested in exploring how new media technologies— which are sometimes perceived as distancing individuals from their bodies—may in fact

be contributing to the development of new competencies for audiences in immersive performance, as Foster observed. The explosion of possibilities that was introduced in 2004 with Web 2.0 initiated a previously unknown level of user interactivity and collaboration, including new platforms allowing mash-ups, nomadicity (the ability of users to connect to the Internet from any location), social networking, crowdsourcing, user-generated content, and social curation sites, such as Reddit, launched in 2005, and Instagram, launched in 2010. It is no coincidence that immersive performance emerged in this era and has become the most significant development in the field of live performance in the first part of this century.[84]

I wish to further research how dance, as used by artistic directors in immersive performance, is enabling audiences to engage in the physical approximation of skills acquired and practiced on the Internet. In other words, I plan to explore how bodies are serving as extensions of technology, and how the intimacy and customization enjoyed on cell phones, tablets, and personal computers is playing out in the ways audiences are managing, manipulating, and experiencing immersive performance. Because of the ubiquity of technology, our bodies are learning how to be extensions of it as we apply media-based skills in different sectors of our lives. For example, Internet browsing is an improvisational activity; once we receive stimuli, impulses, or ideas, we click on a hyperlink and are off to the next platform or web page. Audiences bring their knowledge of technology to performance, both consciously and unconsciously, and artists are using

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[84] Machon acknowledges that immersive performance emerged, in part, through "new possibilities in design and technology" (2013, 27).

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their understanding of bodily adaptability to conceptualize live performance. Or as Tim

Etchells, founder and artistic director of the UK-based performance group Forced

Entertainment, says, "Technology will move in and speak through you, like it or not. Best

not to ignore" (Etchells 1999, 95). Further research into the connections between new

media technologies, social media, and immersive performance will include an

investigation of how audiences are using social media platforms as forums to share

knowledge about and rearticulate their experiences of immersive performance. In

addition, I plan to develop a practice-led research project that integrates serialized online

storytelling with live performance, including dance.

Internationalizing Immersive Performance

The second area of future research is to follow two of the groups studied here—

Punchdrunk and Third Rail Projects—as they expand their immersive work

internationally. In 2015, Punchdrunk launched a new initiative called Punchdrunk

International, the mission of which is to produce works globally with select partners.

Punchdrunk International has announced a collaborative partnership with SMG Live, the

live performance arm of Shanghai Media Group, one of the largest media and cultural

organizations in China. Punchdrunk International and SMG Live are co-producing a

version of *Sleep No More* in Shanghai that will open in December 2016; this production

will be the first of Punchdrunk's work to be premiered in Asia.

Similarly, Third Rail recently expanded to Third Rail International (TRI) and

announced the creation of their Global Performance Studio (GPS), which "supports the

development of international site-specific and immersive performance, and cultivates

opportunities for artists to become leaders of diplomacy through shared practice, dialogue, collaboration, and community building—all within a framework of cultural listening and peer-to-peer artist exchange."[85] In collaboration with the New York City–based nonprofit organization CEC Artslink, TRI/GPS collaborated with American and Russian artists to create *As Time Goes By,* which premiered in March 2016 at the Ziferburg Cafe in St. Petersburg, Russia. I hope to interview Felix Barrett, Maxine Doyle, and Tom Pearson to better understand the impulse to "internationalize" their immersive practices and to gain insight into what they aim to learn through sharing their immersive practices with artists and audiences in other cultures. On the other hand, I am equally curious about how the collaborators and dancers in these cultures perceive immersive practices, particularly how they interpret the impact of immersive performance on themselves as artists and on audiences. Research into the new media technologies and impulses to "internationalize immersive" promises to open up new kinds of interdisciplinary discourses that analyze the global impact of immersive performance through understanding the role of dance and the body in social networks and culture.

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[85] For more information on Third Rail International, the global program of Third Rail Projects, see www.globalperformancestudio.com/gps#about.

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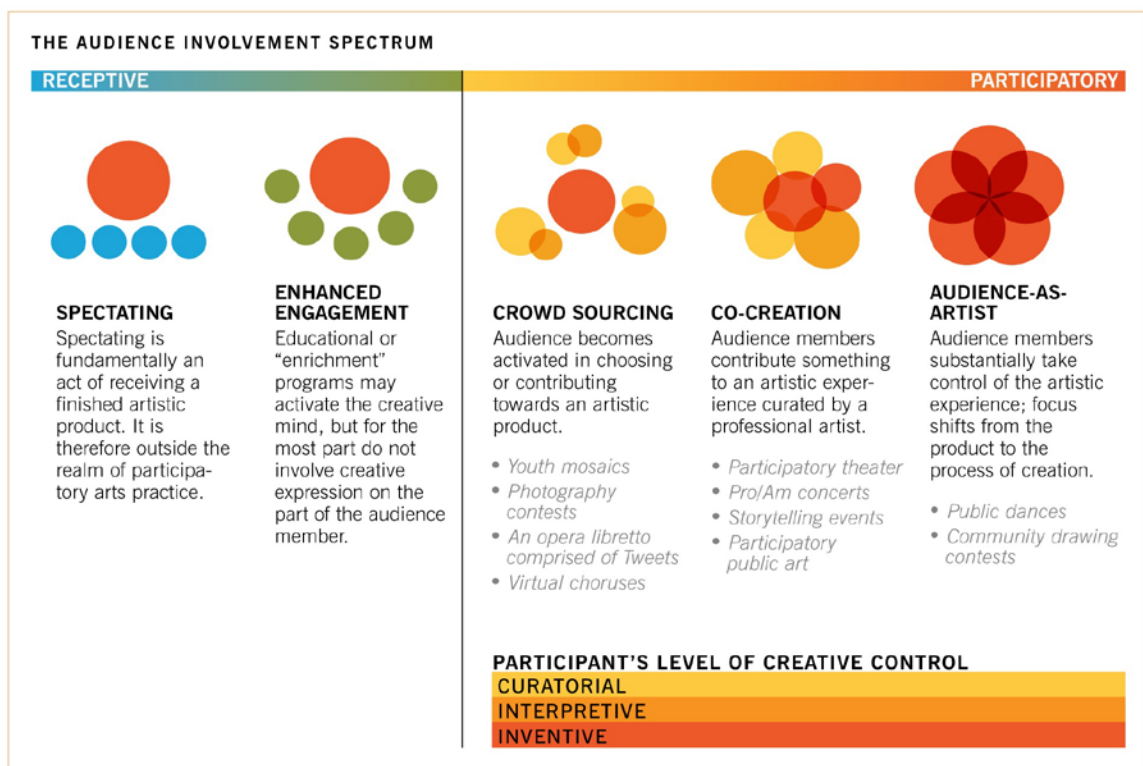   18. Transcript.

APPENDIX A

The Audience Involvement Spectrum

THE AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT SPECTRUM

The Audience Involvement Spectrum appears in *Getting In on the Act: How Arts Groups Are Creating Opportunities for Active Participation,* a study commissioned by the James Irvine Foundation and conducted by WolfBrown. It is "a simple framework developed to describe the different ways participatory arts programs work, and the various entry points for participation" (Brown and Novak-Leonard 2011, 4).

THE AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT SPECTRUM

RECEPTIVE — **PARTICIPATORY**

SPECTATING
Spectating is fundamentally an act of receiving a finished artistic product. It is therefore outside the realm of participatory arts practice.

ENHANCED ENGAGEMENT
Educational or "enrichment" programs may activate the creative mind, but for the most part do not involve creative expression on the part of the audience member.

CROWD SOURCING
Audience becomes activated in choosing or contributing towards an artistic product.

- Youth mosaics
- Photography contests
- An opera libretto comprised of Tweets
- Virtual choruses

CO-CREATION
Audience members contribute something to an artistic experience curated by a professional artist.

- Participatory theater
- Pro/Am concerts
- Storytelling events
- Participatory public art

AUDIENCE-AS-ARTIST
Audience members substantially take control of the artistic experience; focus shifts from the product to the process of creation.

- Public dances
- Community drawing contests

PARTICIPANT'S LEVEL OF CREATIVE CONTROL
CURATORIAL
INTERPRETIVE
INVENTIVE

APPENDIX B

Lyrics for "The History of Dance"

LYRICS FOR "THE HISTORY OF DANCE"

From *Dance Marathon* by bluemouth inc.

Written and performed by Ciara Adams

Copyright bluemouth inc., 2009

(bluemouth inc. 2015a, 12)

In ancient times with dance sublime,

We prayed to god, to buy more time,

and celebrate in sacred shrines, our lives.

Egyptian kings, pharaohs dancing with the street

Walk like an Egyptian.

By the Renaissance the courts caught on,

And European monarchs flung

their partners round the banquet hall with ease.

The minuet, allemande, mazurka and waltz.

Bow to your partner and give them your hand.

Step in step out and face the back wall.

Step touch, step touch,

Step hop, step hop,

step hop walking back around.

Let's try that again everyone

Bow to your partner and give them your hand.

Step in step out and turn to the stage.

Step touch, step touch,

Step hop, step hop,

step hop walking back around.

The less sophisticated folks,

Used Country Dance to get them close,

handed down through centuries

this folkdance is still popular today,

1, 2, 3, 4

Clogging, Maypole, Irish dance,

Do the Polka, come on prance,

Round and round your partner go,

Ball de bastons, square dance, slow.

Morris, sword and country dance,

Swing your partner, come on prance,

Once more round your partner go,

That's enough of going slow.

1, 2, 3, 4

Clogging, Maypole, Irish dance,

Do the Polka, come on prance,

Round and round your partner go,

Ball de bastons, square dance, slow.

Morris, sword and country dance,

Swing your partner, come on prance,

Once more round your partner go,

That's enough theirs [*sic*] more to know.

Somewhere round the 1910's,

A little dance from Argentinian

Society, would change the world.

May I?

First in Paris, then, it spread to London,

Soon New York, Tangoed in abundance,

Valentino helped popularize it,

Rudolph dancing cheek to cheek

Argentina's Tango change the world,

Spread by sailor's, courting local girls,

Mistenguett had couple's dancing slowly,

At Waldorf they Tangoed during tea.

By 1920, live had changed,

A war had made things all seems strange,

Folks seeked opportunities for fun,

Any excuse to put down that old gun!

Then came, the one, most fun, the Charleston,

(Lady Jane starts basic Charleston for audience)

Oh, it proved, we could move, just by,

Kicking our out legs out. (*she adds the high kick)*

Used to, shed the blues, mock the "drys"

Had us Running Wild,

The Charleston, swung us,

In to Lindy hop dancing.

APPENDIX C

Lyrics for "Hipshake Solo"

LYRICS FOR "HIPSHAKE SOLO"

From *Dance Marathon* by bluemouth inc.

Written and performed by Richard Windeyer

Copyright bluemouth inc., 2009

(bluemouth inc. 2015a, 22)

It's wonderful when a girl shakes her hips like that.

Because you know it's not about her hips.

No.

It has nothing to do with her hips.

What you have to look at is the space around her.

Me, I believe that when you see someone, you should look at the space around them.

Don't watch what their body is doing.

Don't look at the way they're moving.

What you should be focusing on is the space that is sculpted by their body.

I'm serious.

Look at it.

You should really see people as a sculpture.

No, you should see people as a sculptor.

As someone who sculpts space with their body.

What you need to do is imagine the air is clay.

Everything is clay.

And the person you're watching is a sculpting instrument.

Like they're a sculpting tool.

Like they're a cutting knife.

APPENDIX D

IRB Approval Letter

TWU
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY
DENTON   DALLAS   HOUSTON

November 12, 2013

Ms. Julia M. Ritter
17 Franklin School Way
Metuchen, NJ 08840

Dear Ms. Ritter:

Re: *Triptychs of Experience: Perspectives of Artists, Performers and Audiences on Dance and Immersive Performance (Protocol #: 17468)*

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp is enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. A copy of the signed consent forms must be submitted with the request to close the study file at the completion of the study.

This approval is valid one year from November 12, 2013. Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any unanticipated incidents. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rhonda Buckley, Chair
Institutional Review Board - Denton

cc. Mary Williford-Shade, Department of Dance
     Dr. Rosemary Candelario, Department of Dance
     Graduate School

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